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Making Spaces Sacred: The Sayyeda Zaynab and Bibi Pak Daman Shrines and the Construction of Modern Shia Identity

Abstract
This dissertation is a study of the Bibi Pak Daman shrine in Lahore, Pakistan and the Sayyeda Zaynab shrine in Damascus, Syria and of how these shrines were made sacred in the 20th century. Said to house the graves of Ruqayyah and Zaynab, two daughters of â??Ali ibn Abu Talib, the first Shiâ??a Imam, the two shrines would grow from local sites of devotion to critical pilgrimage sites in the 20th century. The dissertation will first trace hagiographies related to Zaynab and Ruqayyah and how these narratives capitalized on transnational collective memories of Karbala to reinterpret their significance to local contexts. These saints and their shrines were also increasingly interwoven into Syrian and Pakistani narratives of national exceptionalism. Secondly, these shrines emerged as important national spaces and sites onto which competing claims of authentic authority and ideology were played out. For shrine authorities, religious scholars and students, pilgrims, merchants, and activists, the Sayyeda Zaynab and Bibi Pak Daman shrines provide a window into the distinct ways that sectarianism was produced and the range of practices that constituted â??being Shiâ??a.â??

By the end of the 1970s, the Sayyeda Zaynab and Bibi Pak Daman shrines had become increasingly prominent as sites of meaning-making, especially within a changing geopolitical landscape and as narratives of Karbala were being reinterpreted around the world in the service of newly assertive Shiite identity and visual culture. The third part of this dissertation will address how these shrines were lived spaces, creating both specific shrine cultures and visually linking pilgrims to a transnational Shiâ??a sacred geography.

Thus, this dissertation explores how these shrines were sacralized in the 20th century through narratives, politics, and finances. It will address the unique role that pilgrimage to the shrines of female saints has played in both postcolonial transnational and national politics and in the construction of a Shiâ??a identity in the modern world. Through this dual focus, the project will reveal the way that politics, ritual, gender, and faith function in tumultuous, multi-denominational societies where the balance between religious legitimacy and national ideologies necessitates a constantly-evolving policy towards pilgrimage and shrines.

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MAKING SPACES SACRED: THE SAYYEDA ZAYNAB AND BIBI PAK DAMAN SHRINES AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF MODERN SHI'A IDENTITY

Noor Zehra Zaidi

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me to my first day of kindergarten till the last sentence of this was written; Farhan, who has showed me how to laugh and reminds me that success comes in being humble; Jaffer, who has taught me everything about patience, belief, and selflessness, and that you are stronger than every challenge if you have faith. And finally my parents, Anjum and Sadiq, for whom no words can convey my love and gratitude. They pushed me to be brave when this project seemed impossible, comforted me through every challenge and dead end, took pride in each small victory, and believed in me entirely. Their steadfast faith, companionship, and love are the reason every word of this dissertation was written.

ABSTRACT

MAKING SPACES SACRED: THE SAYYEDA ZAYNAB AND BIBI PAK DAMAN SHRINES AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF MODERN SHI'A IDENTITY

Noor Zehra Zaidi

Firoozeh Kashani-Sabet

This dissertation is a study of the Bibi Pak Daman shrine in Lahore, Pakistan and the Sayyeda Zaynab shrine in Damascus, Syria and of how these shrines were made sacred in the 20th century. Said to house the graves of Ruqayyah and Zaynab, two daughters of 'Ali ibn Abu Talib, the first Shi'a Imam, the two shrines would grow from local sites of devotion to critical pilgrimage sites in the 20th century. The dissertation will first trace hagiographies related to Zaynab and Ruqayyah and how these narratives capitalized on transnational collective memories of Karbala to reinterpret their significance to local contexts. These saints and their shrines were also increasingly interwoven into Syrian and Pakistani narratives of national exceptionalism. Secondly, these shrines emerged as important national spaces and sites onto which competing claims of authentic authority and ideology were played out. For shrine authorities, religious scholars and students, pilgrims, merchants, and activists, the Sayyeda Zaynab and Bibi Pak Daman shrines provide a window into the distinct ways that sectarianism was produced and the range of practices that constituted 'being Shi'a.'

By the end of the 1970s, the Sayyeda Zaynab and Bibi Pak Daman shrines had become increasingly prominent as sites of meaning-making, especially within a changing geopolitical landscape and as narratives of Karbala were being reinterpreted around the

world in the service of newly assertive Shiite identity and visual culture. The third part of this dissertation will address how these shrines were lived spaces, creating both specific shrine cultures and visually linking pilgrims to a transnational Shi'a sacred geography.

Thus, this dissertation explores how these shrines were sacralized in the 20th century through narratives, politics, and finances. It will address the unique role that pilgrimage to the shrines of female saints has played in both postcolonial transnational and national politics and in the construction of a Shi'a identity in the modern world. Through this dual focus, the project will reveal the way that politics, ritual, gender, and faith function in tumultuous, multi-denominational societies where the balance between religious legitimacy and national ideologies necessitates a constantly-evolving policy towards pilgrimage and shrines.

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Introduction
The Daughters of ‘Ali

The genesis of this dissertation began with a few lines of a 1994 hagiography found in the bazar of the Bibi Pak Daman shrine in Pakistan, a site devoted to Ruqayyah bint ‘Ali. In this book, the author describes the long and arduous path which Ruqayyah, a daughter of the first Shi’a Imam, would have traveled from Medina to Lahore to end up at the site in the 7th century. At a time when few women would have made such a difficult journey, much less the veiled daughter of ‘Ali ibn Abu Talib, the Prophet Muhammad’s son-in-law and the founder of Shi’a Islam, Ruqayyah had nevertheless endured great personal hardship in her mission to bring Islam to the subcontinent. Yet, as the author notes, Ruqayyah came to Lahore because it was her divinely ordained destiny. As her father ‘Ali had lay dying years earlier, he had called forth all his children to deliver to them his *wasiyat*, or last will and instructions. While ‘Ali bequeathed to his sons the spiritual leadership of the Islamic *ummah* (community), he had given each of his daughters instructions on where they would travel to spread the Prophet’s true message. Like Ruqayyah, ‘Ali famously charged another of his daughters with a similar mission. Shi’a Muslims have long credited Zaynab bint ‘Ali for her role in carrying on the true message of Islam after the tragedies of Karbala, the seminal moment of the Shi’a faith. She would fulfill her vow to her father through great sorrows and die in Damascus; there, the Sayyeda Zaynab shrine would be built in her honor. Yet the trials of Ruqayyah and Zaynab were not in vain. “Today, where Islam is present and prevails, it was because

there was the presence of the daughters of ‘Ali; however, where the women of ‘Ali did not reach, Islam has not remained,” the hagiography declared.[1]

This striking interpretation of the role of ‘Ali’s daughters in the spread of Islam raised the questions that form the basis of this dissertation on the evolution of pilgrimage (*ziyārat*) to the Sayyeda Zaynab and Bibi Pak Daman shrines in the 20th century. Only decades earlier, these had been relatively minor sites, overshadowed by the scale of Shi’a devotion to the male Imams. Now, a hagiography found at one of the shrines positioned these female saints as the embodiment of Islam’s success. Yet if Zaynab and Ruqayyah carried the weight of Islam to what would become Syria and Pakistan, what did that mean for the shrines that marked their sacred graves? What legends were constructed for these women and what work was done to highlight their centrality in Islam? How then did these shrines function both in the construction of a transnational imagined sacred geography and within emerging national frameworks in the post-World War II era? As the shrines became increasingly visible sites of religious devotionalism in two countries where Shi’as constituted a minority, how did pilgrimage to the shrines change as what it meant to be Shi’a evolved during the 1970s?

Meaning Making at the Sayyeda Zaynab and Bibi Pak Daman Shrines

In his discussion of Shi’a shrines in Syria, anthropologist Yasser Tabbaa posed the question of how shrines become sacred, of “what physical remains, historical evidence, or pious tales were required to infuse sanctity into these particular spots to

[1] Masood Hashmi, *Makhdooma Bibi Ruqayyah Bint Ali: Bibi Pak Damana Lahore Mein* (Lahore:

prompt their future rebuilding."[2] The complexities of why and how the Bibi Pak Daman and Sayyeda Zaynab shrines were sacralized illuminate the ideological tensions of nation-building projects and the new ways Shi'as were engaging with public religiosity. Unlike the older shrine towns in Iraq and Iran that had emerged centuries earlier under the interplay of empires, powerful networks of Shi'a religious scholars (known as *ulama*), and patronage regimes, the Sayyeda Zaynab and Bibi Pak Daman shrines rose to prominence in the context of the emerging nation-states of Syria and Pakistan. Beginning in the mid-20th century, the shrines benefitted from concerted efforts to verify their authenticity, expand the shrines, and justify pilgrimage and ritual practice.

As the Bibi Pak Daman and Sayyeda Zaynab shrines grew from small local sites of devotion to shrines of transnational and national consequence in the independence era, the importance of the two shrines was inevitably intertwined and bolstered by new hagiographical focus on Zaynab and Ruqayyah's lives. The first section of the dissertation will trace the evolution of these hagiographies through the 20th century and explore how narratives were used in the service of promoting ideological agendas in the expansion of the shrines. Zaynab and Ruqayyah's stories were expanded and individualized, tied both to an evocative transnational narrative of Shi'a martyrology and to the countries to which they came. As geopolitical realities influenced perceptions of Shi'a history, so too did interpretations of Zaynab and Ruqayyah's lives. The interplay between narrative and place was cemented as the implications of pilgrimage to the two shrines grew in Shi'a conceptions of sainthood and sacred space.

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[2] Yasser Tabbaa, "Invented Pieties: The Rediscovery and Rebuilding of the Shrine of Sayyida Ruqayya in Damascus, 1975-2006," *Artibus Asiae,* Vol. 67, No. 1, Part II (2007), 97.

Yet the construction of *ziyārat* in Shi'a history itself remains unsettled, and this dissertation seeks to denaturalize the concept of Muslim pilgrimage. Shrines drew their potency in part by claiming a long history of visitation and miraculous interventions. Yet the Sayyeda Zaynab and Bibi Pak Daman shrines were newer shrines with contested histories and politics, placed within a sacred geography that drew resonance from claims of an unbroken chain of transmission and practice. The concept of 'sacred geography' in this dissertation is borrowed from Diana Eck, a scholar of South Asian religions who has explored the interconnected pilgrimage sites scattered throughout India and examined the interplay between texts, places, and faith. For Eck, the intersection between mythology and geography, between the sacred and the profane, is how Hindus have "mapped" their world. Here I employ this concept to the construction of Shi'a understandings of a map of faith, grounded both in the particular and in the abstract.[3] Sacred geography also flattens the sense of time, tying shrines in their present state directly back to the origins of the faith and presenting an unchanged reality. Thus, the question of history and tradition was complicated on the space of these shrines; as female saints, discourses about Shi'ism and *ziyārat* had to expand in turn. The anthropologist Talal Asad has noted that Islam itself is a discursive tradition, a religion defined by discourses "that seek to instruct practitioners regarding the correct form and purpose of a given practice, precisely because it is established, has a history."[4] These shrines thus gained authenticity through

[3] See Diana Eck, *India: A Sacred Geography* (New York: Harmony Books, 2012)
[4] Talal Asad, "The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam," *Qui Parle,* Vol. 17, No. 2 (Spring/Summer 2009), 14. Originally published in 1986 as part of the Occasional Paper Series sponsored by the Center for Contemporary Arab Studies at Georgetown University. Asad notes that traditionally anthropologists have dealt with the diversity of "Islams" by distinguishing between text-based practice of the towns and the "saint-worshipping, ritualistic religion of the countryside," arguing that both types formed in different ways under different conditions.

reinterpretation of Zaynab and Ruqayyah's lives, by harnessing the long-established tradition of *ziyārat* to sacred spaces, and projecting coherence with that history. They resist simple anthropological dichotomies of text-based practices versus ritual invention. They are not settled spaces, but rather "lieux de memoire" as Pierre Nora describes, operating between history, tradition, and collective memory.[5]

These narratives, of course, would not exist in a vacuum; they interacted with the realities on the ground and forces that were invested in the promotion and expansion of Bibi Pak Daman and the Sayyeda Zaynab. The second section of the dissertation will analyze the shrines' interaction with the developing sovereign states of Syria and Pakistan and the ways these sites became enmeshed in local and regional politics as the new states attempt to assert federal authority. Indeed, as dominant ideologies shifted from the end of foreign occupation through the tumultuous 1970s, the presence of shrines for Ruqayyah and Zaynab provided a powerful tool for asserting identity. Successive governments sought to maintain a balance between calculated distance and active engagement in shrine affairs. Yet these were lived spaces, and pilgrims, shrine officials, and religious leaders exerted their own pressures. They would become microcosms of accommodation and conflict, sites where the practices of being sectarian emerged. In both Syria and Pakistan, traditional elites, new regime officials, shrine authorities, and individual pilgrims were brought together at the shrines, making these spaces onto which debates about the nature of the state and the performance of 'being Shi'a' were mapped.

[5] See Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History; Les Lieux de Mémoire," in *Representations,* No. 26, Special Issue: Memory and Counter-Memory (Spring, 1989), 7-24.

The pilgrims who visited the Sayyeda Zaynab and Bibi Pak Daman also created their own frameworks for understanding ritual and meaning, especially at shrines devoted to two female saints. The third part of the dissertation will compare and analyze the distinct shrine cultures that emerged at the Sayyeda Zaynab and Bibi Pak Daman and their interconnectedness within a global pilgrimage market. The rise of assertive interpretations of Shi'ism and a new visual culture in the 1970s and 1980s changed how pilgrims, particularly women, engaged with the physical space of the shrines, the rituals they undertook, and the souvenirs they collected. Who was visiting these shrines and how they created meaning emphasizes anthropologist Pnina Werbner's assertion that pilgrimage centers are not just political or religious sites but sites of sacred exchange.[6]

Thus, the Sayyeda Zaynab and Bibi Pak Daman shrines function on three levels – the transnational, the national, and the transactional. The two sites provide an insight into how faith and politics function in two distinct, tumultuous, and multidimensional nations, where Shi'as form a significant religious minority. In debates over narratives, patronage, politics, and ritual, they reflect the deep fissures and anxieties over religious devotionalism and the compatibility with modern nation-building projects, of what 'being Shi'a' meant in a changing geopolitical landscape, and over gender and public practice. This dissertation will draw on a syncretic methodological approach and multiple strands of historiography, drawing from various disciplines to unpack the process of making, activating, contesting, and imagining these shrines.

[6] See Pnina Werbner and Helene Basu, eds. *Embodying Charisma: Modernity, Locality and the Performance of Emotion in Sufi Cults* (London: Routledge, 1998).

Karbala, *Ziyārat*, and Sacred Geography

The importance of the Sayyeda Zaynab and Bibi Pak Daman shrines at its core is tied to the continued resonance of the events that unfolded at Karbala in the 7th century. Karbala is the foundational myth of the Shi'a faith, the lens through which all events before and after it is viewed, constructing a language of martyrology that has been reinterpreted through the centuries. It was not the first historical event that would create a divide in the Muslim *ummah*, as Shi'a partisans first emerged as a response to political debates over succession after Muhammad's death. According to Heinz Halm, however, it is only after Karbala that one can speak of true Shi'a aspirations.[7] It is the event that has been crystallized into a powerful collective memory, one malleable enough to accommodate competing ideologies and interests. For Hamid Dabashi, Karbala is the "central trauma of Shi'ism," continuously reinvented within a "nexus of emotive responses and political instincts" that assumes a renewed significance at a vastly popular level, which extends its narrative domain from medieval to modern as it does from sacred to worldly and cosmopolitan dispositions.[8] Its commemoration has constructed an expanding sacred geography, one that in the post-WWII era was recast to reflects the intersection of new national interests, sectarianism, gender and ritual practice. It is within this context that the Sayyeda Zaynab and Bibi Pak Daman shrines grew in prominence.

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[7] Heinz Halm, *Shi'ism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004); see also Marshall G. Hodgson, "How Did the Early Shi'a Become Sectarian?" *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 75, No. 1 (Jan.-March, 1995), 1-13; Kamran Scot Aghaie, "The Origins of the Sunnite-Shi'ite Divide and the Emergence of the Ta'ziyeh Tradition," *TDR*, Vol. 49, No. 4, Special Issue on Ta'ziyeh (Winter, 2005), 42-47; Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Ideals and Realities of Islam* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1966).

[8] Hamid Dabashi, *Shi'ism: A Religion of Protest* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), 85-86, 95.

The centrality of *ziyārat* stems from the question of religious and political succession after the Prophet Muhammad, a debate that lay at the heart of the Shi'a-Sunni split. Muhammad's death in 632 AD sent cataclysmic shock waves through the Muslim *ummah*, suddenly faced with the death of its singular political and religious leader. While the majority of the *ummah* settled upon Abu Bakr, a senior companion and father of one of the Prophet's wives, as the first Caliph and political successor to Muhammad, a small but vocal faction continued to advocate for leadership to pass to 'Ali. Despite being passed over for the caliphate, he was nevertheless accepted by the *Shi'atu 'Ali* (followers of 'Ali) as the first Imam, God's spiritual representative on earth. 'Ali was finally declared the fourth Caliph in 656 AD, though Shi'as continued to believe that the previous three had usurped the leadership that Muhammad had divinely bestowed on him. Indeed, the immediate household of Muhammad (the *Ahl al-Bayt*) was especially venerated by Shi'as, who would come to believe that legitimate political and spiritual authority was passed on from Muhammad to 'Ali and through the generations, from father to son, to form the unbroken chain of the Twelve Shi'a Imams.[9] Shunned from political power, the Imams would instead be seen as the true living spiritual embodiment of Muhammad's Islam, figures that symbolized the oppression of political authority.[10]

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[9] Shi'a Muslims believe that the family of Muhammad was specifically invoked in the Qurān in numerous verses, including 33:33 (Al-Ahzāb, "Allah has decreed to remove from you the impurity [of sin], O people of the household"). The *Ahl al-Bayt* are traditionally referred to as Muhammad, 'Ali, Fatima, Hassan, and Husayn, although later *hadith* traditions would extend the purification to the offspring (descendants) of 'Ali, the descendants of Aqīl and Muslim bin Aqīl, the offspring of Ja'far (whose son Abdullah married Zaynab bint 'Ali), and the offspring of 'Abbas ibn 'Ali. See Muslim ibn al-Hajjaj, *Sahīh Muslim,* Vol. 31 – one of six canonical collections of *hadith* in Islam – and "Ahl al-Bayt", *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam,* ed. John Esposito (Oxford Islamic studies online), accessed Aug. 20, 2014.

[10] A prominent literature exists documenting the religious and political history of the Shi'a- Sunni split; for a concise version of the development of Twelver Shi'a Islam, see Moojan Momen, *An*

‘Ali was poisoned just five years after his appointment as Caliph; at that time, ‘Ali assigned the guardianship of the *ummah* to his sons and reminded Husayn of the test that would come for him at Karbala. It was an event that had been foretold to Muhammad by the angel Jibreel and shared with ‘Ali and his family from the time Husayn was a young boy: on the banks of the Euphrates, the men of the Prophet’s household would endure days of hunger and thirst before death, but Husayn and his family would be martyred preserving the Islam of the Prophet. This predetermination is a central component to the story of Karbala and, consequently, the traditions and narratives that emerge from it.[11] The men would knowingly and willingly sacrifice themselves in the service of the true message of Islam. The women would be left, made to endure whatever hardships were in store and create and preserve a collective memory of these events.

For the Shi’a faithful, ‘Ali’s prophecy was fulfilled during the Islamic month of Muharram in 680 AD, when Husayn and 72 male companions were martyred at the hands of the Umayyad host numbering in the tens of thousands. Husayn had been ordered to pledge allegiance to the new Umayyad Caliph, Yazīd ibn Muawiyah but had refused,

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Introduction to Shi’i Islam: The History and Doctrines of Twelver Shi’ism (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987). It was only centuries later, with the crisis posed by the disappearance of the young Twelfth Imam, that Shi’a theologians and juridical authorities codified doctrine to address the unbroken chain of authority and the legitimacy of governance in the physical absence of the Imam. See Said Amir Arjomand *The Shadow of God and the Hidden Imam: Religion, Political Order, and Societal Change in Shi’ite Islam from the Beginning to 1890* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

[11] The concept of the predetermination of Karbala is found as early as the 9th century in the works of Ahmad ibn Hanbal, considered the founder of one of the major schools of Sunni jurisprudence. Ibn Hanbal is also one of the most accepted transmitters of authentic *sunnah* (proscribed sayings and teachings of Muhammad). According to a tradition accepted by ibn Hanbal, Umm Salamah, one of the Prophet’s wives, narrates, “the Prophet said: An angel that has never visited me before came to this house today, and he said to me: This son of yours Hussain will surely be killed. And if you wish, I can give you some soil of that land (Karbala) which he will die in. He (the Angel) then brought me soil that was red.” See Ahmad ibn Hanbal, *Kitāb Fadhā’il al-Sahaba,* Vol. 2, Hadith #1357 (Qom: n.d.) 965.

viewing Yazīd's rule as illegitimate. On the first of the Islamic month of Muharram, the Umayyad army intercepted Husayn's family and companions in the deserts of Karbala for a last confrontation. Along with his half-brother and standard-bearer Abbas were Husayn's wives, young children, sisters, and closest followers. Seven days into the standoff, water and food were cut off from the small band. On the tenth of Muharram, the day commonly referred to as *Ashura* by Shi'a Muslims, Husayn and his 72 male companions one by one rode out to battle and were killed by the large Umayyad force. Husayn's 6-month old son 'Ali Asghar was slain by an arrow. Among the men, only Husayn's sick son and the fourth Shi'a Imam, 'Ali Zayn al-'Abidīn, was spared. The women of the camp, led by Husayn's sister Zaynab, sacrificed their husbands and children without complaint; through much grief they remained steadfast in their belief in the righteousness of the cause. Abdullah ibn Ja'far, Zaynab's husband and nephew of 'Ali ibn Abu Talib, did not travel with the caravan to Karbala but was said to have felt great satisfaction at the news of the sacrifice of his two sons in Husayn's name.[12] After *Ashura*, the women and young children were taken into captivity and paraded unveiled through Iraq and Syria to Damascus, the seat of Umayyad rule, their humiliation serving as a warning to those who would support the *Ahl al-Bayt.* In Damascus, Zaynab was the first to conduct a *majlis*, a mourning gathering to recount the trials of Karbala. She also publically delivered a *khutba* (speech) against Yazīd's injustice in the Umayyad court, condemning his actions against Muhammad's family.[13] When they were finally released from Damascus on the fortieth day after *Ashura*, the caravan traveled to Karbala, where

[12] Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari, *Tārikh al-Rasul wa al-Muluk*, 4:357.
[13] For a compilation of Zaynab's various *khutba* on the journey from Karbala to Damascus, see Badr Shahin, *Lady Zaynab*, 2nd ed. (Qum: Ansariyan Publications, 2006).

the women sat at the graves of their loved ones, remembered the events of *Ashura* and wept. The wives, daughters, and sisters of the martyrs of Karbala were thus the earliest mourners – they were the first to undertake *ziyārat* to Husayn's grave and their suffering formed the basis of rituals of lamentations.[14]

According to historian Yitzhak Nakash, for Shi'a Muslims, the tragedy of Karbala and the commemoration of the events would become "vital for reinforcing their distinct Shi'i identity and collective memory... to evoke every year the sorrow and memory of Karbala, and to transmit it to generations to come."[15] In the immediate aftermath of the events of Karbala, the Umayyad caliphs sought to curtail access to the tomb, reacting to the perceived political danger of a galvanized minority by instituting patrols on the roads to Karbala, arrests, and even executions for pilgrimages attempted on a mass scale.[16] Still, Shi'a Imams emphasized two important tenets amongst their devotees – that the tragedies of Karbala were pre-ordained by Allah and that the visitation to the graves of important Shi'a martyrs was a way to gain favor, as the Prophet and 'Ali had promised that while the righteous would be few at Karbala, a whole faith would emerge to honor

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[14] For more on the general narrative of Karbala, see E. Honigmann, "Karbala'," *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed. [4:637-639]; 'Abbas al-Qummi, *Mafātih al-jinān* (Beirut: Dar al-Mujtaba, 1st printing, 1995); Mahmoud Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering in Islam: A Study of the Devotional Aspects of 'Ashura' in Twelver Shi'ism* (The Hague: Walter de Gruyter, 1978); Ali J. Hussein, "The Mourning of History and the History of Mourning: The Evolution of Ritual Commemoration of the Battle of Karbala," in *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East,* 25 no. 2 (2005), 78-88;

[15] Yitzhak Nakash, "An Attempt to Trace the Origins of the Rituals of Ashura." *Die Welt des Islams,* New Series, Vol. 33, Issue 2 (Nov., 1993), 165.

[16] al-Tabari, *Tārīkh al-Rasul wal-Mulūk,* 7:365.

the martyrs of Karbala.[17] Rather than an unexpected tragedy, Karbala became the fulfillment of a prophecy and the embodiment of ultimate obedience.[18]

Through severe restrictions, Shi'a pilgrims were told to emulate the devotion and intense grief of the first visitors to the grave – Zaynab, the young children and wives of the dead, and Jabir ibn Abdullah, one of Muhammad's closest companions. Despite the constant threats to his life, the fourth Imam Zayn al-'Abidīn encouraged those Shi'as who were able to safely perform *ziyārat* to do so and to undertake the pilgrimage in somber conditions similar to that of the Hajj.[19] By the ninth century the imams began to institutionalize the ziyārat practices. The fifth and sixth Imams, Muhammad al-Baqir and Ja'far al-Sādiq were especially prolific in religious scholarship, writing extensive treatises for the Shi'as to follow. As a consequence of the difficult conditions under which these pilgrimages emerged, an ethos developed around *ziyārat* that emphasized a sense of fear and awe, a humble physical state, a single-minded devotion to the journey, and a great reward. According to the sixth Imam, Ja'far al-Sādiq, (d.765 AD), any Shi'a undertaking *ziyārat* of Husayn's shrine would be rewarded as if he has performed "one

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17 Indeed, Shi'a narrations and theology would link the importance and vitality of *ziyārat* to the comfort it gave these infallible believers at Karbala during their trials. The promise of devotees and believers visiting the shrine gave heart to Husayn's son Zayn al-Abidīn. In his grief, Zaynab reminded him that Allah had made a covenant with some people to gather the remains of their loved ones and raise a flag to the tomb of the martyrs. Through the centuries, Zaynab promised, this mark would endure. See Ibn Qulawayh al-Qummi, *Kamil al-Ziyārāt,* (New York: Al Khoei Foundation Books, 2004), 447. Ibn Qulawayh Al-Qummi's (d. 990) work is one of the most complete sources for Shi'a Muslims on the spiritual benefits of *ziyārat*, drawing on quotations and sayings from the imams and their companions. Many of these traditions would be expanded on in Shaykh Abbas al-Qummi's (d. 1981) *Mafatih al-Jinān*.

18 The pre-determination of Karbala would become a critical component of Shi'a theology, most clearly articulated by the famed seventeenth-century theologian Muhammad Baqir al-Majlisi (d. 1698). His *Bihār al-Anwār* is the *locus clasicus* for much Shi'a jurisprudence and eschatological beliefs that developed since and is the most comprehensive hadith collection in the Shi'a *fiqh*.

19 al Baqir Sharif al-Qarashi, *Hayat al Imam Zayn Al-Abidīn* (Qom, Iran: Ansariyan Publications, 2000), 35-42.

thousand purified Hajj and one thousand purified *Umrah* [a visit to Mecca outside of the official Hajj period]" with a prophet or with the successor of the prophet.[20] Ja'far al-Sādiq was said to have lamented, "If I told you about the merits of [Husayn's] *ziyārat* and his grave, you would completely abandon going to Hajj."[21] The Imams and their companions also detailed the appropriate behavior and emotion of the *zā'ireen* (pilgrims), with emphasis placed on humble manners and ascetic behavior at the shrine. Their diet was not to consist of rich foods, with bread and milk being the preferable option; al-Sādiq lamented that those who visit the graves of their parents went in great sadness, yet those who visit the grave of Husayn "take large supplies of food and travel accessories."[22]

Even as visits to the shrines were encouraged through great spiritual reward, patronage and financial support of the shrines was seen as an additional means to derive blessings. As Khalid Sindawi notes, despite the early prohibitions, there were periods of greater permissiveness, including during the reign of the sixth Imam, Ja'far al-Sādiq, when traditions and elegiac poetry exalting *ziyārat* to the shrines flourished.[23] Beginning with the Abbasid regime, Shi'a dynasties bestowed shrines with extensive gifts in order to gain spiritual and political legitimacy.[24] By the 9th and 10th centuries, with the rise of the Buwayhids and Hamdānites in the later Abbasid dynasty, the doctrinal, popular, and

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20 Ibn Qulawayh, *Kamil al-Ziyārāt,* 335

[21] Ibn Qulawayh, *Kamil al-Ziyārāt*, 244

[22] Ibn Qulawayh, *Kamil al-Ziyārāt*, 268

[23] Khalid Sindawi, "Visit to the Tomb of Al-Husayn b. 'Ali in Shiite Poetry: First to Fifth Centuries AH (8th-11th Centuries CE)," *Journal of Arabic Literature,* Vol. 37, No. 2 (2006), 230-258. According to Sindawi, the work of the Syrian poet Al-Sanawbarī (d. 943 CE), who lived his entire life in Aleppo and Damascus, melded the evocative nature of *ziyārat* with older patterns of Arabic poetry, hinting that pilgrimage had become frequent in his time and that pilgrimage poetry had become common.

[24] See Mrs. Meer Hassan Ali, *Observations on the Mussulmans of India*. (Compiled by Oxford University Press, 1917) for details of patronage of shrines by Iranian and Awadh Shi'a dynasties

religious support of *ziyārat* was reflected in a growing travel literature – including references to a widening sacred geography, no longer just concentrated in Medina, Mecca, and Karbala. In the 12th century, Ibn Jubayr discussed the Shi'a population of Damascus, where there "are shrines of many of the family of the Prophet, men and women – may God hold them in His favour – whose edifices have been adorned by the Shi'ites and which have large pious endowments."[25] The famed Muslim traveler Ibn Battuta asserted, "The variety and expenditure of the religious endowments at Damascus are beyond computation."[26] By the turn of the nineteenth century, Persian traveler Mirza Abu Taleb Khan was describing the evolution of *ziyārat* and the commerce and industry that had emerged around the shrines. He acknowledged, "the number of pilgrims who visit these sacred places bring a great quantity of money into the country, and yield a considerable revenue to the State…so that it is to Turkish avarice we are indebted for the freedom enjoyed here."[27] The shrines to Shi'a Imams had expanded dramatically, growing in influence amongst religious and political authorities.

Indeed, many of the major Shi'a shrines under Ottoman control had achieved a level of political and economic autonomy as a result of their ability to attract pilgrims and pious donations from Shi'as. The Iraqi shrine cities lay on the frontier of the Safavid-Ottoman tension, caught between – and often shaping – political rivalries and dynastic ambitions. Juan Cole has explored the currents that played out on the Iraqi frontier shrine

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[25] Ibn Jubayr, *The Travels of Ibn Jubayr,* trans. R.J.C. Broadhurt. (London: The Camelot Press Ltd., 1952).
[26] Ibn Battuta, *Rihlat – Travels in Asia and Africa, 1325-1354*, trans. Hamilton A.R. Gibb (Delhi: Pilgrims Book Pvt. Ltd, 1929).
[27] Abu Talib Khan, *The Travels of Mirza Abu Taleb Khan*, trans., Charles Stewart (New Delhi: Sona Publications, 1972); see also Major P.M. Sykes, *The Glory of the Shia World: The Tale of a Pilgrimage* (London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1910) for further description of shrine visitations in the early 20th century.

cities, highlighting the critical geopolitical and theological movements, especially in the 1843 Ottoman invasion of Karbala.[28] The Safavid and especially Qajar relationship with the shrines and their *ulama* communities was especially complex, with regimes both drawing authority from and disputing the scope of shrine influence in political life.[29] In his study of political and economic patronage networks amongst the *ulama* of the Iraqi shrine cities in *Shi'i Scholars of Nineteenth Century Iraq*, Meir Litvak underscores the importance of the financial activities of these shrines and the ability the *ulama* had to encourage economic activities amongst a network of pilgrims and pious believers.[30] By the early 20th century, shrine finances had begun to include the promotion of souvenirs and tokens, as pilgrimage had become a focal point of the local economy. According to Litvak, the production and sale of basic religious relics was a major component of the local industry in Karbala, especially clay tablets used by believers to rest their head during prostration in prayer. While a select few *ulama* protested that the "selling the clay taken from the area made sacred by the blood of Husayn was tantamount to selling Husayn's very flesh," their objections could not curtail this popular practice.[31] *Ziyārat* had emerged as a negotiated response from a faith repeatedly confronted with the traumatic murders of its male authority figures and stripped of political power. It had now grown into a transnational force.

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[28] Juan Cole, *Sacred Space, Holy War: The Politics, Culture, and History of Shi'ite Islam* (New York: I.B. Taurus, 2002).
[29] See Hamid Algar, *Religion and State in Iran, 1785-1906: The Role of Ulama in the Qajar Period* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980); Halm, *Shi'ism*; Arjomand, *The Shadow of God and the Hidden Imam*.
[30] Meir Litvak. *Shi'i Scholars of Nineteenth Century Iraq: The 'Ulama of Najaf and Karbala* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).
[31] Meir Litvak, "The Finances of the 'Ulama' Communities of Najaf and Karbala, 1796-1904." *Die Welt des Islams*, New Series, Vol. 40, Issue 1 (March 2000), 60.

By the time of the British occupation of Iraq after World War I, the scope of pilgrimage had increased exponentially. Administrative reports discuss the "hundreds and thousands of Shi'a pilgrims that annually visit the Holy Places of 'Iraq from Persia and India" and that the well-being of these shrine cities "to a large extent is dependent on those pilgrims."[32] In Samarra, site of the shrines of the 10th and 11th Imams, "the pilgrim traffic to the shrines creates a trade of its own, to meet with there is a bazaar in good repair termed the Hindi or Persian bazaar."[33] Though pilgrimage was curtailed during the war, according to British authorities "permission to renew it was given in 1919, and exceptionally large numbers availed themselves of it. An average of 7,000 pilgrims a month passed through the frontier town of Khaniqin," the main border town from Persia, with more arriving from the Indian subcontinent.[34] British authorities noted that while pre-war border crossings at this one town alone were estimated at close to 34,000, by 1920 the number had jumped to over 44,000, a number that was still limited by internal problems that beset the pilgrimage routes.[35] Yitzhak Nakash estimated that by this period the average number of Shi'a pilgrims arriving from India and Iran numbered 100,000 annually.[36] These accounts, spanning centuries, construct an emerging map of sacred geography, one that was claimed to be immutable and pre-ordained by God and

[32] Iraq Administrative Reports, Vol. 2. Administrative Report of the Kadhimain District from 11th March 1918 to 31st December 1918.
[33] S. Murray, Captain, Political Officer, Samarra. Administration Report of the Baghdad Wilayat, 1917.
[34] Review of the Civil Administration of Mesopotamia – Occupation of the Basrah Wilayat . 3rd December, 1920.
[35] T. Barrett Heggs. Annual Report of the Health Department for the Year 1920. Administrative Report. Baghdad: Printed at the Government Press, 1921.
[36] Yitzhak Nakash, "The Visitation of the Shrines of the Imams and the Shi'i Mujtahids in the Early Twentieth Century," *Studia Islamica,* No. 81 (1995), 157.

Muhammad's will. The righteous authority of the Prophet's male descendants would be reaffirmed with every visitation.

Yet despite the growing numbers of pilgrims who performed *ziyārat*, pilgrimage to these shrines remained a difficult endeavor, one that was undertaken only by devout Shi'a who were willing to endure the hardships of the journey and the conditions of *ziyārat*. A description of a pilgrim's ordeal in British records gives more detail:

> After a prodigious journey in inclement weather, subsisting upon a minimum of food in the shape of chupatties [an unleavened cake of bread], slaking his thirst with impure water and, as a result of his diet, weakened by enteritis and a form of scurvy, the pilgrim arrives at the holy town at last, with the wish to die there as his sole sustaining force. He proceeds to die in the street or in the mosque and it is to make the end of these pilgrims more comfortable, or even to give them a chance of recovery…. As regards to statistics, the just way to look at the figures is to say that about 50 per cent recovered.[37]

Though written centuries after Muhammad al-Baqir and Ja'far Al-Sādiq, the Civil Surgeon's description of the pilgrims was remarkably close to the state of deprivation that early religious authorities outlined. Nor was process limited to personal risks. In 1925, the Wahhabiyya movement, with the backing of the Ibn Saud tribe, destroyed *Ahl al-Bayt* graves of the Prophet's family in Medina's holy al-Baqī' cemetary. Indeed, the graves of the Imams in the Iraqi provinces and the Hijaz had been attacked multiple times, especially through the late 19th and early 20th century.

Notably, for centuries, it was largely men who were undertaking *ziyārat* -– male pilgrims who were traveling in increasing numbers to pay respects to Husayn, the leader, 'Abbas, the warrior, and the other men who had laid down their lives beside them. Poetry, hagiographies, and religious tracts abounded to explore the life of the male

[37] Review of the Civil Administration of Mesopotamia – Occupation of the Basrah Wilayat. 3rd December, 1920.

martyrs. While it was the female survivors of Karbala who had first returned to mourn on at the site, it was the male Imams who delineated the boundaries of a faith. Male religious and political authorities sought to institute the rituals of lamentation and *ziyārat* performed by Zaynab and the sisters and wives of Husayn's companions around the suffering of their bodies and the sacrifices of their children. The shrines to the Imams and their companions became the main points on this constructed and gendered sacred geography, imagined and guarded by religious authorities and the predominantly male pilgrims themselves. Zaynab is a narrator of traditions, quoted in pilgrimage texts such as *Kāmil al-Ziyārat*, but it is to encourage the pilgrimage to her brother's grave.

Nor did these visitations and rituals emerge unchallenged. Indeed, as pilgrimage grew and the commemorative practices became more widespread and publically enacted, concerns were raised inside and outside of the community. Historian Max Weiss has analyzed a bevy of tracts written in the early 20th century by prominent Shi'a leaders and *marja',* (senior members of the religious hierarchy and sources of emulation) debating and defending the practices of *ziyārat* and Muharram rituals. The leading Shi'a *mujtahid* (an accepted senior Shi'a theologian) in Damascus, Syed Muhsin al-Amīn (d. 1952) was a central part of what Weiss has termed the "Ashura Debates." According to Weiss, al-Amīn displayed a deep concern with how the Shi'a community in Jabal 'Amil was perceived in relation to pressing concerns with modernity, both by the majority Sunni population and Mandate authorities. In a series of controversial writings, he advocated for streamlining practices and limiting objectionable public demonstrations such as weeping, self-flagellation, and large processions, which he viewed as recent innovations to Karbala

rituals.[38] Al-Amīn similarly addressed the central concern of *ziyārat*; according to Nakash, he "prohibited the worship of the tomb itself and disapproved of many of the popular practices associated with the cult of saints in Islam in general…Yet, contrary to the Sunni position, al-Amīn allowed the glorification of the tombs of the imams as part of the general worship and glorification of God."[39] Al- Amīn defended the expansion and decoration of the shrines as sites to commemorate pious models for living – support that would later provide an impetus to the growth of the Sayyeda Zaynab shrine.

By the outbreak of WWII, the construction of a distinctly Shi'a sacred geography through narrative, religious exhortations, patronage, and practice had resulted in sprawling shrine cities in Iraq and Medina. The authenticity and sacralizing of these shrines drew from a long chain of traditions and *rihla* (travel) literature to bolster the claims that *ziyārat* was an essential and original aspect of Shi'a doctrine. Even as the older shrines endured, however, new sites would emerge, expanding the map that Muhammad and 'Ali envisioned. The Sayyeda Zaynab and Bibi Pak Daman shrines would emerge in sprawling urban settings, not in cities that grew as byproducts of pilgrimage to its shrines. As urban shrines that operated within a particular social life, they were textual spaces that had new interpretations written onto them. The work to place these shrines firmly on the map was done in the 20th century, when these women's stories become individualized and linked to particular sites of commemoration and new nation-states.

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[38] Max Weiss, *In the Shadow of Sectarianism: Law, Shi'ism, and the Making of Modern Lebanon* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 74-82.
[39] Nakash, "The Visitation of the Shrines of the Imams, 159.

Transnational Spaces

The emergence of the Sayyeda Zaynab and Bibi Pak Daman was intricately linked to evolving narratives that sacralized the shrines by placing Zaynab, Ruqayyah, and their sacrifices at the center of Karbala's many tragedies. It would become the lesson of Karbala that the death for men was final and their suffering temporary. It was left to the women to carry on the message, to endure more lengthy struggles in the name of Islam. The legacy of Karbala was secured on the female body – through the voluntary sacrifice of their children and their forbearance through much hardship. Where they went after Karbala thus could be expanded and intrinsically linked in to the central sacrifice at the heart of Shi'a Islam. As such, the role of the female companions such as Zaynab and Ruqayyah provided the broadest realm of possibilities for reinterpretation and it was onto their lives and shrines that meaning was made and challenged. Indeed, rather than remain peripheral sites of worship, it would be through visitation to their shrines that the full scope of sacrifice at Karbala could be understood. Who these women were, where they were buried, and why they were buried in those locations became prominent questions in 20th century transnational Shi'a narratives.

Scholars of Shi'a Islam have long emphasized the appeal of shrines in the lived imagination of devotees and the transnational links of sacred space. Yitzhak Nakash, Meir Litvak, and Juan Cole have worked extensively on the transnational flow of pilgrims, patronage, and ideologies that shaped the development of Iraqi shrine cities. The critical roles of memory, symbols, and narratives have figured more recently in the works of scholars such as Kamran Scot Aghaie and Syed Akbar Hyder. Aghaie in particular has focused on symbolic discourses surrounding gender and the women of

Karbala.[40] These works have emphasized the duality of Shi'a devotionalism – while the power of narratives and symbols draw on transnational emotional frameworks, they are also decidedly influenced by the particularities of their local contexts. As Roschanack Shaery Eisenlohr has noted, "transnationalism is always reconfigured in articulation with local sociopolitical and economic realities and interests."[41] Understanding transnational narratives as a category of practice thus reveals the political nature of social memory. According to Shaery Eisenlohr, these memories are critical "in the formation of group identities among members of transnational Shi'i networks, negotiating cross-border solidarities and national difference." Why Zaynab and Ruqayyah ended up in what would become Syria and Pakistan are social memories, which Shaery Eisenlohr argues are "not static but are in dialogue with the political contexts. They often shift in the dynamic world of Shi'a transnational politics."[42] Thus, hagiographies about Ruqayyah and Zaynab were constructed within particular ideological currents, revealing the political and religious interests at stake in framing the histories of these shrines.

In her work *Recovered Roots*, Yael Zerubavel explores the relationship between place, history, and memory, illustrating how a diverse society of immigrants constructed a national identity based on reinterpreting and commemorating key religious tales. Zerubavel engages with what Maurice Halbswachs' "collective memory": a narrative that exists between history and memory, though the two do not operate in complete

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[40] Kamran Scot Aghaie, *The Women of Karbala: Ritual Performance and Symbolic Discourse in Modern Shi'i Islam* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005).
[41] Roschanack Shaery-Eisenlohr, *Shi'ite Lebanon: Transnational Religion and the Making of National Identities* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 10.
[42] Roschanack Shaery-Eisenlohr, "Postrevolutionary Iran and Shi'i Lebanon: Contested Histories of Shi'i Transnationalism," *International Journal of Middle East Studies,* Vol. 39, No. 2 (May, 2007), 271-289.

opposition. She argues, "The power of collective memory does not lie in its accurate, systematic, or sophisticated mapping of the past, but in establishing the basic images that articulate and reinforce a particular ideological stance."[43] Similarly, the hagiographies constructed about Zaynab and Ruqayyah were not uncontested or without ambiguities, but they increasingly created tales of extraordinary lives that could be mapped and commemorated onto expanding pilgrimage sites. As Zerubavel notes, certain events "can continue to occupy a central place in the group's memory in spite of the tensions underlying their commemoration."[44] In this way, historical specifics become subsumed for sacred narrative that were linked to particular sites of commemoration.

Shi'a narratives over the developing Sayyeda Zaynab and Bibi Pak Daman shrines shortened the distance of time and space, enabling devotees far removed from the lands of Karbala to access the communal memory of suffering – with memory and legend often framed as history. These hagiographies shortened historical distance, allowing a linear argument to be made between commemoration of Karbala at these shrines and the events of Karbala itself. Hamid Dabashi's recent work on Shi'ism is particularly instructive here. Dabashi employs the Weberian framework of charisma and prophetic leadership to explain the complex and continuing appeals of the Imams, as well as their constant reimaginings as symbols of protest. Shi'ism, according to Dabashi, "is an attempt to sustain Muhammad's charismatic authority, prolonging his personal presence from generation to generation by extending it from an Islamic prophetology [*Nubuwwah*]

[43] Yael Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 8.
[44] Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots,* 10.

to an Shi'i imamology [*Imamah*]."[45] I argue that hagiographies expand this framework further, extending Muhammad's charisma through 'Ali to his daughters and their shrines. Indeed, a common current through these narratives is how these women became divine.

Chapter One explores the evolution of hagiographies about Zaynab bint 'Ali from a passive victim of Karbala's tragedies to a defiant revolutionary, central to the endurance of Husayn's message. Early Arabic sources recounting the events of Karbala spared little detail on Zaynab's life and character beyond Karbala, instead portraying her solely as the weak, grief-stricken embodiment of female suffering. While Zaynab's *khutbāt* were quoted, they were not the focal point of these early texts. The influence of the Safavid dynasty and the institutionalization of Shi'ism, however, led to more detailed, evocative Persian-influenced portrayals of Zaynab by the beginning of the 20th century. It was in the 1930s, however, and the work of the *marja'* Syed Muhsin al-Amīn that link between person, place, and narrative became pronounced. For al-Amīn's ideological reformism, Zaynab represented the ideal mourner in character and behavior, and his hagiography of her life emphasized her lofty status amongst the *Ahl al-Bayt*. In turn, the presence of her grave in Damascus opened tremendous possibilities. A shrine for Zaynab could be a place that would raise the status of Shi'as under the French Mandate, a site where his modernist vision of Karbala rituals could be enacted.

The split between Sunni and Shi'a interpretations of Zaynab's life would also become more pronounced in the context of new nation-states. In 1966, the Egyptian Aisha 'Abd al-Rahman published a hagiography of Zaynab entitled *Batalat Karbala: Zaynab bint al-Zahrā*. 'Abd al-Rahman was from a generation of prominent Egyptian

[45] Dabashi, *Shi'ism,* 44

women writers involved in the nationalist movement. Her Zaynab was the embodiment of the Islamic ideal for a woman – pious, educated, a wife and mother who was able to step into the political arena when circumstances demanded – but she was also a national figure. Egyptians had long held the view that Zaynab bint 'Ali was buried in Cairo, and her shrine there had been a recipient of political patronage for centuries. Shi'as, in turn, would reject this interpretation, as they were making pilgrimage in growing numbers to the shrine in Damascus. By the 1970s, a new assertive Shi'a rhetoric would recast Zaynab's life and death into an essential part of the events of Karbala, creating greater impetus for *ziyārat* to the growing Sayyeda Zaynab shrine. In 1979, a popular hagiography written by a Pakistani scholar in Damascus would be the culmination of centuries of hagiographies on Zaynab. *Marqad al-'Aqīlah Zaynab* tied the blessings of her sacred shrine in Damascus to her central role in the salvation of Shi'ism; *ziyārat* to the Sayyeda Zaynab shrine thus allowed pilgrims to capture the same collective memory and identity as a visit to the Iraqi shrine cities.

The ambiguities of hagiographical constructions of women's lives and the opportunities that provided new nation-states form the basis of Chapter Two. If Zaynab was a 'historical' figure, one whose existed was documented in early accounts of Karbala, how Ruqayyah bint 'Ali arrived in Lahore was the subject of intense investment after Pakistan's independence. Under British colonial rule, few written individual hagiographies existed about Bibi Pak Daman. As Christopher Taylor has noted on Muslim shrines, "In many instances, the record of the lives and works of the saints relied exclusively on oral transmission, since there was no transcendent institutional framework

to promote the cult."[46] Though Bibi Pak Daman was a visited site, Ruqayyah bint 'Ali and her shrine warranted brief mentions in compilations on the lives of important Sufi saints. Her mere presence, however, was a powerful symbol of Muslim opposition to Hindu rule. For anti-colonial and anti-Hindu activists, Ruqayyah's arrival in Lahore represented the indigenous nature of Muslim life in the subcontinent.

The lack of specificity in Ruqayyah's life would nevertheless lead to competing interpretations and hagiographic impulses. While the new Pakistani state would affirm the narrative of Ruqayyah's presence in Lahore, many Sunni Muslims continued to believe that the grave belonged to another woman. For the Shi'as of Pakistan, this interpretation represented a deliberate attempt to erase them from the nation's history. In 1979, the publication of an extensive hagiography on Ruqayyah and Bibi Pak Daman would capture the way narrative had a dramatic impact on the realities on the ground and the tensions between national and transnational imaginings. The belief in Ruqayyah was thus linked to clear assertion of identity and understandings of history.

Methodologically, using hagiographical texts as primary sources provides a way of understanding transnational historical perspective that is grounded in the specific and local. As Karen Ruffle has stated in her work on ritual performance in South Asia, "the composition of hagiographies, their performed narration, and the construction of spaces memorializing saints thus comprise parts of a profoundly social process."[47] These narratives shaped pilgrims' understandings of the shrine and their place on a map of Shi'a sacred space, but they also reveal why particular frameworks were constructed and how

[46] Christopher Taylor, "Saints, Ziyāra, and the Social Construction of Moral Imagination in Late Medieval Egypt," *Studia Islamic,* No. 88 (1998), 107
[47] Karen G. Ruffle, *Gender, Sainthood, and Everyday Practice in South Asian Shi'ism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 3.

the symbiotic link between space, meaning-making, and the conditions that make meaning were forged.

National Spaces

The Sayyeda Zaynab and Bibi Pak Daman shrines drew on centuries of transnational narrative construction, but they would also become deeply embedded in their national milieus as group and state investment in the shrines grew more pronounced. New regimes in Syria and Pakistan developed strategies for engaging with these sites, negotiating the difficult balance between using the shrines to bolster their religious legitimacy and managing sectarian pressures. The Sayyeda Zaynab and Bibi Pak Daman shrines were placed within the bureaucratic frameworks that emerged after national independence, as the new states sought to institutionalize the management of sacred spaces. Yet they also had complicated relationships to concepts of the past and tradition, with new shrines positioned as cultural heritage and with the endurance of older forms of familial or relational authority. As shrines to Shi'a female saints, pilgrims and entrenched interests at the sites had their own interpretations on the meanings and functions of these spaces.

Consequently they represented *internal* frontier shrine, sites in dense urban spaces that functioned as internal boundaries and borders, physical spaces onto which competing ideologies were mapped and contested. The concept of the frontier shrine comes from the work of Juan Cole, who focuses on the shrine cities of Karbala and Najaf through the 19th century. In *Sacred Spaces and Holy War,* Cole argues that the conditions of the Shi'a shrine cities of Karbala and Najaf captured the actual boundaries between the Safavid and

Ottoman empires through the 19th century. These contested shrines would become microcosms of the conflicts over power, territory, authority, and finance, and barometers of the state of geopolitical tensions and identity formation. While Cole focuses on external borders, delineating rival political power, this chapter adapts the terminology to argue that the Sayyeda Zaynab and Bibi Pak Daman became *internal* frontier shrines. They mirrored the debates about ritual, authentic authority, ideology, and identity that were playing out on a national level. Yet these spaces also brought transnational forces together at the shrine to interact, forming extraneous and extra-territorial frontiers.

If these shrines were important as microcosms for debate, however, they also reveal a window into the myriad of ways of 'being Shi'a' in new nation states where Shi'as constituted a minority. Recent trends in historiography have rejected the idea of the immutability of religious identity, instead emphasizing the manner in which sectarianism is produced and lived by the interplay of particular conditions. According to Max Weiss, sectarianism "is a way of being in the world that depends upon a set of cultural markers and social practices, a framework capable of holding familial, local, regional, and even international loyalties together."[48] These behaviors were institutionalized in Lebanon with the creation of Shi'a Ja'fari courts, which created a state apparatus that endorsed sectarian identity. In his study of Mount Lebanon, Ussama Makdisi similarly argues that sectarianism was produced, arising out of a moment of crisis for the Ottoman regime, between the pressures of European colonialism and *tanzimat* imperialism. According to Makdisi, "This encounter profoundly altered the meaning of religion in the multi-confessional society of Mount Lebanon because it

[48] Weiss, *In the Shadow of Sectarianism*, 13.

emphasized sectarian identity as the only viable marker of political reform and the only authentic basis for political claims."[49] This dissertation seeks to add another dimension to work on the construction of identity and sectarian behavior by understanding why shrines develop and analyzing how attempts to regulate ritual and space often facilitated and activated sectarian behavior at the Sayyeda Zaynab and Bibi Pak Daman.

For centuries Zaynab's gravesite had been little more than a small room housed in a modest brick and mortar structure and run as a *waqf* property by the Murtadha family, caretakers who claim to be direct descendants of the Imams.[50] Chapter Three follows how narratives of Zaynab's importance interacted with forces on the ground committed to the shrine's expansion, as Muhsin al-Amīn, the Murtadha family, individual donors, and foreign *marja'* combined to create a shrine that would rival the pilgrimage sites of Iran and Iraq. Historiography on the Syrian nationalist movement has long privileged the role of a Sunni urban elite, yet in the Mandate era, the shrine provided a space for local Shi'a elites to engage in the nationalist enterprise. The politics of Shi'a personal leadership and charismatic authority was critical at the Sayyeda Zaynab, yet these authorities also responded to pressures from those using the shrines. In the immediate aftermath of Syrian independence, a shrine committee was formed in 1952 to administer and promote *ziyārat*

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[49] Ussama Makdisi, *The Culture of Sectarianism: Community, History, and Violence in Nineteenth Century Ottoman Lebanon* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 2.

[50] The *waqf* (plural, *auqaf/awqaf*) is an inalienable religious endowment in Islamic law (land, trust investment, or other kind of property). Though the broad guidelines governing *waqf* trusts are laid out in Sha'ria law, local regulations and interpretations have varied across Muslim societies. In many societies, *waqf* endowments evolved into a method to protect familial inheritance and retain these properties in private hands, rather than ceding control of wealth to become property of the ruler. Individuals could thus donate properties as *waqf* and name descendants as their trustees (*mutawalli*), guaranteeing that some portion of revenues remain with the family. For more on the jurisprudence basis of the *waqf*, see Muhammad Zubair Abbasi, "The Classical Islamic Law of Waqf: A Concise Introduction," *Arab Law Quarterly,* Vol. 26, No. 2 (2012), 121-153

to the shrine. As noted by Italian scholar Marco Salati, despite their critical role in the construction of a shrine that would capture the faith of millions, "There is no specific study on the Murtadha family to date."[51] This chapter explains the influence of the Murtadha family and how they would propel the growth of the Sayyeda Zaynab shrine in the 1950s and 1960s, as they called on the support of '*marja* and individual pilgrims to donate to the shrine as a modern expression of devotion. While the shrine cities of Iran and Iraq were established sites of influence and authority, the Sayyeda Zaynab represented a permissive new space onto which religious scholars, businessmen, and the Shi'a faithful could articulate their Shi'ism. The donations and bequests made by Shi'as for the support of the shrine represented expressions of individual sectarian piety. Nevertheless, the Syrian Ministry of Awqaf remained wary of the overabundance of foreign donations to a national site; it was the connections of the Murtadha family that allowed the shrine committee significant leeway in the promotion of the site.

The Ba'athist coup in Syria and the rise of Hafez al-Assad in 1971 would have a significant impact on the Sayyeda Zaynab, changing perceptions of the government's relationship with the Islam. The rise of the nominally Shi'a Alawi would combine with the growing popularity of the charismatic Shi'a scholar Musa al-Sadr and intensifying unrest of Shi'a *ulama* in Iran and Iraq through the 1970s; these ideological and political shifts would transform what being Shi'a meant. The shrine would become a national issue, promoted by political authorities that sought to solidify the position of the Zaynabiyya as a rival Shiite site of pilgrimage to Iran and Iraq. Who was visiting and

[51] Marco Salati, "Presence and Role of the Sadat in and from Gabal `Amil (14th-18th Centuries)," *Oriente Moderno* Vol. 79, No. 2 (1999), 599.

living at the Sayyeda Zaynab was altered, with the common thread of Shi'ism uniting these disparate groups. While Muhsin al-Amīn had first emphasized the Arab heritage of the shrine, by the end of the 1970s rhetoric about Zaynab had framed her as a Shi'a revolutionary and her shrine became a distinctly sectarian space.

The tension between national appeals, local particularism, and the creation of sectarianism at Bibi Pak Daman is the focus of Chapter Four. Like at the Sayyeda Zaynab shrine, through the 1950s local residents and traditional authorities had managed the administration of Bibi Pak Daman, forming familial and religious ties around the shrine. In the 1960s, under Field Marshall Ayub Khan, the government federalized control of all *waqf* property in the country, the result of a long history of ideological mistrust of the perceived mystical hold that shrines and saints had on the masses.[52] As a result of the nature of the shrine, however, the consequences of this takeover at Bibi Pak Daman were more pronounced than at any other sacred site. As with the case of the Sayyeda Zaynab and the Syrian government, the government of Pakistan displayed an ongoing interest in promoting the shrine as a site of pilgrimage, even as it sought to mediate conflict with Sunni populations over the character of the shrine and its place in nationalist rhetoric. At Bibi Pak Daman, the shrine was declared a Sunni shrine to pacify the majority of pilgrims, though Auqaf officials acknowledged it was the grave of Ruqayyah bint 'Ali. Yet the entrance of the state into the shrine created the conditions for sectarianism to emerge. In the 1970s, multiple conflicts between Sunnis and Shi'as flared up at the shrine, forcing the state and courts to repeatedly intervene in the management of the

[52] Katherine Pratt Ewing. *Arguing Sainthood: Modernity, Psychoanalysis, and Islam* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997)

shrine. Once again the importance of these women would color the motivations of shrine authorities and devotees alike. A shrine for the daughter of ‘Ali and the sister of Husayn was a powerful ideological tool, bringing the core of Shi’a history into national milieus.

The political upheavals of the 1970s would have a direct impact on life at the shrine. In 1971, the secession of East Pakistan and establishment of Bangladesh would challenge the concept of Islamic political unity and undermine the central premise of Pakistan’s *raison d’être*. In turn, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, a secular Shi’a politician, would bend to pressure from conservative Islamist groups demanding greater involvement of religion in the state. The coup of General Zia ul-Haq in 1977 would dramatically accelerate these pressures, creating a state-sponsored normative version of Islam that challenged Shi’a narratives and theological underpinnings. The ways that shrine officials and pilgrims negotiated the changing national environment illustrate how Shi’as perceived themselves and Ruqayyah’s shrine. For Shi’a pilgrims, their rights as citizens were tied into the ability to mark Karbala mourning rituals at Bibi Pak Daman.

The Auqaf documents at Bibi Pak Daman and the shrine committee’s records at the Sayyeda Zaynab shrine provide a rich insight into the ways Shi’a shrines were managed, promoted, and contested in a period of great instability. They reveal how shrines are constructed and lived through politics, influence, and finances. The *fatwas* from leading *marja’* to the Murtadha family illustrate the responsiveness of Shi’a religious authorities to matters at sacred shrines. Letters between shrine authorities and political appointees reveal the minute, day-to-day concerns that plagued administrators at the shrine. Memos and expansion plans detail the efforts to promote and expand *ziyārat* to the shrines. Yet the presence of residents and pilgrims can also be found in these

documents. Some wrote petitions and letters directly, demanding recognition of their grievances, many choosing to engage with the shrines in a sectarian framework. Other voices can be read through the correspondences between shrine officials detailing particular concerns or crafting appropriate responses and plans. Supplemented by personal archival collections and newspaper articles, these documents demonstrate the very real, lived ways in which 'being Shi'a' was actualized at the Bibi Pak Daman and Sayyeda Zaynab shrines.

Transactional Spaces

Though the 1970s, the pressures of geopolitical events had created outward pulls on the Sayyeda Zaynab and Bibi Pak Daman shrines. Shi'a communities had become increasingly galvanized, rallying around revolutionary interpretations of Karbala and the lives of revered Shi'a martyrs. Anthropologist Michael Fischer has coined the phrase the 'Karbala Paradigm' to analyze the politicization of Shi'a discourses and rituals around these events and the emphasis on Karbala "as a rhetorical device [and] a mnemonic for thinking about how to live."[53] In this paradigm, Muharram rituals and narratives are interpreted along a spectrum from 'quietist' to 'revolutionary', with anthropologists and historians arguing that the shift in emphasis of the Karbala Paradigm in latter half of the 20th century has moved away from accommodation to conflict.[54] In particular, the radical

[53] Michael Fischer, *Iran: From Religious Dispute to Revolution* (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1981), 22.

[54] Scholarship on the Karbala Paradigm and adoption of these tropes in the service of political and social movements exploded in the aftermath of the Iranian Revolution, with new attention paid to the ways narratives of Karbala were appropriated in the modern context to organize dissent and action. See Juan Cole and Nikki Keddie, *Shi'ism and Social Protest* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986); Nikkie Keddie, *Religion and Politics in Iran: Shi'ism from Quietism to*

ideological agendas of the Iranian sociologist Ali Shari'ati and Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini and the Iranian Revolution of 1979 would transform understandings of Shi'a public ritual and sacred spaces. A new assertive Shi'a material culture would flourish in shrine bazaars, creating transnational visual markers of identity. In the context of the Iranian Revolution and Shi'a mobilization, z*iyārat* to shrines would take on an added political and sectarian dimension.

How shrine officials, Shi'a pilgrims, and bazaar merchants in Bibi Pak Daman and at the Sayyeda Zaynab understood these changes is explored in Chapter Five. In 1979, the Sayyeda Zaynab shrine committee and the Ministry of Awqaf approved plans for a significant expansion, financed by the new Iranian government. This moment represented a significant new context for the shrine. The Syrian shrine authorities had long been the guiding force behind the Sayyeda Zaynab, retaining a measure of local control and using their social status to bring others to engage with the shrine; now, a foreign, avowedly Shi'a regime was directly involved in the management of the site. Strong relations between Iran and the Syrian Ba'athist party added another dimension to the site, with the alliance actively promoting *ziyārat* to the Sayyeda Zaynab as a political and ideological tool. These developments marked the shrine as a distinctly Shi'a space in narrative, finances, politics, and visuals.

Revolution (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983); Kamran Scot Aghaie, *The Martyrs of Karbala: Shi'i Symbols and Rituals in Modern Iran* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2004); Lara Deeb, *An Enchanted Modern: Gender and Public Piety in Shi'i Lebanon* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006); Peter Chelkowski and Hamid Dabashi, *Staging a Revolution: The Art of Persuasion in the Islamic Republic of Iran* (New York: New York University Press, 1999); Shahrough Akhavi, "The Ideology and Praxis of Shi'ism in the Iranian Revolution," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 25, No. 2 (April 1983), 195-221.

Since the 1980s, Shi'a religious material culture has formed a new economic transnationalism, visible at the two shrines. Iranian involvement would transform the aesthetics and space of the shrine. The style of construction would tie the Sayyeda Zaynab to Iranian-backed shrines across Shi'a sacred geography and an expanded bazaar would become a place where pilgrims could articulate identity. Similarly, at Bibi Pak Daman, the items sold in the bazaar would tie devotees to Shi'a spaces, cementing the connections between the shrine and a sectarian worldview. I argue that the bazaar cultures act as portals, allowing devotees to access broader religious meanings embedded in their practices while still engaging in localized economic activity. I adopt David Morgan's assertion that belief is in part a visual practice, and the acts of seeing the shrines and engaging in consumption and ritual created new ways of 'being Shi'a.[55] A flourishing field of material culture analysis has addressed the way commodities and exchanges have shaped identity and memory, with research increasingly done on Muslim visitations.[56] Here I argue that commodities, gifts, and souvenirs all played a part in the acts of *ziyārat* and meaning-making at the Sayyeda Zaynab and Bibi Pak Daman shrines.

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[55] David Morgan, *The Sacred Gaze: Religious Visual Culture in Theory and Practice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005)

[56] See Arjun Appadurai, ed., *The Social Life of Things* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Caroline Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988); Kajri Jain, *Gods in the Bazaar: The Economies of Indian Calendar Art* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007); Marita Sturkin, *Tourists of History: Memory, Kitsch, and Consumerism from Oklahoma City to Ground Zero* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007); Leigh Schmidt, *Consumer Rites: Selling American Holidays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997); Gregory Starrett, "The Political Economy of Religious Commodities in Cairo" in *American Anthropologist,* New Series, Vol. 97, No. 1 (Mar., 1995), 51-68; Colleen McDannell, *Religion and Popular Culture in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995); Paulo Pinto, "Pilgrimage, Commodities, and Religious Objectifications: the Making of Transnational Shi'ism between Iran and Syria," in *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East,* vol. 27(1), 109-125.

Rather than peripheral activities, pilgrims themselves acknowledge the ways that consumption had become a modern articulation of *ziyārat* rituals.

The development of the ethos of a religious consumer at the shrines problematizes the Durkeimian concepts of the sacred and the profane, a distinction that scholarship is increasingly challenging. According to Suzanne Kaufman,

> Historians of religion typically disregard links between faith and the marketplace, perhaps from fear of "denigrating" the integrity of their subject matter. The persistence of such concerns helps to explain why historians have dismissed as superficial or inauthentic what might otherwise be recognized as significant characteristics of religious expression.[57]

The acts of marketing *ziyārat* and the purchase of religiously significant objects are ways to understand memory and 'being Shi'a.' These purchases, however, were not simply limited to religious trinkets. A watch or jewelry was given particular meaning when purchased near the shrines, as pilgrims tied their purchase to narratives about Karbala.

Yet these purchases and rituals did not go unchallenged, both by outsiders and Shi'a faithful alike. Iranian influence in culture and politics was similarly countered by the rise of radical Sunni responses. While the use of objects and images in religious commemoration has been an increasingly observable phenomenon in Shi'a rituals, the concept of materiality has a complicated place in Islam, opening up devotees to criticism of *bid'ah* (innovation) and *shirk* (idolatry). As Ingrid Flaskerud points out, for believers these items were "vehicles for communication between worshippers, mediators, and God…It should however be noted that the visual imagery was not the object of worship." As a Shi'a religious scholar took pains to describe to her, "Pictures could help

[57] Suzanne Kaufman, *Consuming Visions: Mass Culture and the Lourdes Shrine* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), 8.

worshippers to focus on God. He described visual imagery as a way, a *tariqeh,* to God."[58] The representational nature of these images was particularly relevant at the Sayyeda Zaynab and Bibi Pak Daman shrines, where specific figural illustrations of Ruqayyah and Zaynab did not exist because of traditional injunctions against the depiction of women. Instead, like their shrines, depictions of these women become vessels for greater meaning.

Ultimately, understanding these shrines as lived spaces means recognizing how people on the ground engaged with them as transactional sites – shrines where belief was commoditized and exchanged and where the performance of rituals was rewarded with blessings. As Robert Orsi has encouraged, "There are aspects of people's lives and experiences within religious worlds that must be included in our vision and attended to beyond what is officially sanctioned. This is a call, then, for attention to religious messiness, to multiplicities, to seeing spaces as always, inevitably, and profoundly intersected by things brought into them from outside."[59] In addition to land permits and letters written between pilgrims and shrine officials, fieldwork, ethnography, and conversations with devotees at the Sayyeda Zaynab and Bibi Pak Daman shrines illuminate how the shrines were used and interpreted by pilgrims – many of them women – in rapidly changing landscapes. The items they bought and sold, the actions they performed, and the meanings they subscribed to them are explored in this last section.

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[58] Ingrid Flaskerud, "Aesthetics and Women's Mourning Ceremonies," in *The Women of Karbala: Ritual Performance and Symbolic Discourses in Modern Shi'i Islam,* ed. Kamran Scot Aghaie (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005), 75.
[59] Robert Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth: The Religious Worlds People Make and the Scholars Who Study Them* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 169.

Studying History in Moments of Change

The majority of research and fieldwork for this project was carried out during periods of intense sectarian conflicts at the Sayyeda Zaynab and Bibi Pak Daman shrines. Understanding the complexity of how these shrines came to have significance was a delicate balance in a period when these discourses about meaning and history had hardened into violent confrontation. In Syria, uprisings against the Ba'athist regime had morphed into an outright sectarian war. Foreign fighters had flooded into the country to wage *jihad* against Bashar al-Assad and his Iranian backers, while Shi'a militias from Lebanon, Iraq, and Iran had converged to defend the country against puritanical *Salafi* Islamist parties. The Sayyeda Zaynab shrine would become a symbolic and literal battleground between these opposing ideologies.[60] In Pakistan, the resurgence of violent Islamic extremist groups, systematic target killing, and bombing campaigns against religious sites have led to increasing fears of Shi'a genocide.[61] Bomb threats against shrines became a common occurrence, but as a shrine with implications for Shi'a Muslims, Bibi Pak Daman was shut down for prolonged periods on multiple occasions. Yet ironically, both devotes and enemies of these sites were increasingly operating off the same conclusion – these *were* shrines to Ruqayyah and Zaynab and they did have significant meaning for the nature of Islam. The narrative, political, and ritual constructions of the 20th century had achieved success.

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[60] See Toby Matthiesen, "Syria: Inventing a Religious War," *The New York Review of Books,* June 12, 2013. Accessed February 2014. http://www.nybooks.com/blogs/nyrblog/2013/jun/12/syria-inventing-religious-war/

[61] Arif Rafiq, "Sunni Deobandi-Shi'i Sectarian Violence in Pakistan: Explaining the Resurgence since 2007," *MEI Reports,* December 2014. Accessed January 2015. http://www.mei.edu/sites/default/files/publications/Arif%20Rafiq%20report.pdf

I was fortunate in these conditions to make connections that allowed me access to the shrine records from Bibi Pak Daman and Sayyeda Zaynab. These records contain a wealth of information, much of it previously unused by historians. Personal documents and collections were also another critical resource for this work, including legal petitions, *waqf* documents, and letters. Yet other archives – including those of the Syrian Ministry of Culture and Ministry of Awqaf – were simply off-limits. Visiting the shrines also meant daily confronting the possibility of violence. Many of those pilgrims that did visit the shrines were willing to talk, providing invaluable insight into the ways that *ziyārat* was practiced and understood, but few were willing to lend their names to this work. Nevertheless, research constraints also presented a unique opportunity to approach these shrines from a multidisciplinary angle, to engage with texts, spaces, objects, and people alike.

Chapter One
The Trials of Umm al-Masā'ib, the Mother of all Hardships

The 19th century Urdu poet, Mir Anis, found some of his most evocative source material in the multiple tragedies of Karbala. A prolific and celebrated writer, Mir Anis was a favorite of the wealthy Indian courts and influential citizens in the Indian province of Awadh, who promoted the printing and oral recitations of his work throughout the region. The recitation of his *marsiyas*, or elegiac poetry written about the sacrifice of Husayn and his companions, would become an enduring element of Shi'a devotional practice in the subcontinent, read in public gatherings and referenced by generations of new orators. While Karbala was replete with emotional sacrifices, it was to Zaynab's suffering that Anis' *marsiyas* often returned. Her grief and pitiable state in the journey from Karbala allowed for the maximum invocation of pathos. Anis' Zaynab became the embodiment of the helplessness of the women at Karbala, who were not individually defined beyond their familial link to the men that were martyred. Zaynab's fear is prominent throughout his most popular works. In "Hazrat Zaynab Yazid ka Darbar Mein [Hazrat Zaynab in Yazīd's Court]," Anis writes of the arrival of the prisoners to the gates of the Umayyad courts,

> Bano [Zaynab] began to weep in grief,
> Weak arms wrapped around at the entrance pillar
> She collapsed on the dirt, and the daughter of 'Ali began to lament,
> "I will not show my face, I will not come before this tyrant and apostate."
> A soldier came forward towards Zaynab with ropes to bind her
> Sajjad [Husayn's son] ran forward in disbelief, "how can you dare?"
> Weeping he begged of Zaynab, "For Allah's sake, come before Yazid…
> Do you not remember my father's will?"

[Zaynab] began her lament, beating her chest, and rose.[62]

Zaynab is reluctant and weakened by her hardships – a common emotional portrayal in Anis' time – and defined solely through her loss at Karbala.

Similarly, through the turn of the 20th century commemoration for Zaynab was tied primarily to Husayn, both in narrative and practice. It was through hagiographies of Husayn and the Shi'a infallibles that glimpses of Zaynab's life emerged and through *ziyārat* to Husayn's shrine that Zaynab was primarily remembered. Her shrine remained a small clay and brick structure marking her purported grave outside of Damascus. However, Zaynab's depictions became more complex and assertive in the later 20th century as Shi'ism grew politicized and the interpretive stakes around her life became higher – even before she was adopted as a central figure in the rhetoric of the Iranian Revolution. New national constructs, geopolitical relations, and ideological debates gave impetus to more developed interpretations of Zaynab and her importance to Shi'a practice. Beginning in the 1950s, hagiographies began to explore the specifics of Zaynab's life, raising her to the same stature as the Imams whose shrines were mandated pilgrimage sites. Many of these hagiographies sought to authenticate her final resting place, as sacred competition between graves in Egypt and Syria took on greater political resonance. As Husayn's first pilgrim she became the parable of mourning for Shi'as, embodying the behavior that later *za'ireen* (pilgrims) would emulate. As the daughter of Fatima bint Muhammad, the sacrifice from her body in the death of her children, her endurance of harsh physical treatment, and the tears she wept sacralized the events of Karbala. Her journey after Karbala as she traveled to *al-Shām* (the region of Damascus),

[62] Mir Anis, "Hazrat Zaynab Yazid ki Darbar Mein," n.d.

Medina, and beyond became an essential part of mourning narratives. As Shi'a communities began to galvanize in political arenas, accounts of her role after Karbala transformed her into a defiant symbol of resistance.

The development of Zaynab hagiographies over the 20th century, written primarily by male Shi'a religious scholars and writers, would reframe Zaynab's life as a central story of Shi'ism; thus, a visit to her shrine would be equal to *ziyārat* of Husayn, which traditions claimed was as spiritually beneficial as the Hajj. Nor did these works appear in a political or social vacuum. The creation of new states, establishment of political and regional alliances amongst Shi'a movements and institutions of learning, and transnational developments would spur a new interest in the shrine of Sayyeda Zaynab. Detailed hagiographies and narratives about Zaynab emerged apace with the expansion of the shrine, reflecting and encouraging her growing importance in Shi'a jurisprudence and popular practice. Yet these narratives were also produced and appropriated by women, creating a gendered framework for understanding Zaynab bint 'Ali and her importance to the Shi'a faith. Indeed, by 1985, the respected Lebanese *mujtahid* Ayatollah Muhammad Mehdi Shams al-Din noted that Zaynab was the root of Shi'a mourning traditions – a root that was notably female and subject to shifting interpretations and anxieties over 'appropriate' behavior. Yet by extension, Zaynab's growing role as the embodiment of commemoration necessitated and validated a space devoted to her memory.

The "Historical" Zaynab

Zaynab was raised in the Prophet Muhammad's household, but little was written of her in the early years of Islam beyond her presence at Karbala. The early recorded

history of Karbala was itself sparse, with oral accounts the primary source of knowledge and transmission. Beginning in the 10th century, however, the events of Karbala were documented in multiple historical chronicles, most prominently in the famed *Tārikh al-Rusūl wa al-Mulūk* by the Sunni scholar and historian Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari. More commonly referred to as *Tārikh al-Tabari,* the chronicle is one of the main religious and historical sources of early Islam; the volume entitled "The Caliphate of Yazīd bin Mu'awiyah" detailed the tragic incidents on the battlefield and political repercussions of the aftermath of Karbala. Zaynab appears in this history only during Karbala, with little focus on her life before or after returning to Medina. While Zaynab's speeches against the Caliph Yazīd on the journey from Karbala are lauded, she is more frequently simply referred to as the sister of Husayn. Zaynab remains defined solely in her relation to the men of Karbala and the sorrow the sacrifice of her sons and brothers caused her. Most critically, though, al-Tabari credits her for the survival of Zayn al-Abidīn, Husayn's son and the designated fourth Imam; thus, she is responsible for the continuation of the unbroken line of the Shi'a Imamate. Zaynab nursed him through his illness during Karbala and in the long march towards Damascus protected him from harm and Umayyad soldiers with her body, accusing, "I plead to you by Allah, if you are a believer, if you kill him, you must kill me with him."[63] Knowing he could not strike down the daughter of 'Ali so publically without incurring the wrath of an already restless population, Yazīd relented. Through the purity of her female body was the male Imamate saved. Yet Tabari's text also notes that Zaynab herself never sought an outsized role in the aftermath of Karbala. Tabari narrates that when Ubaydallah ibn Ziyad, the governor

[63] Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari, *Tārīkh al-Rasul wa al-Muluk,* 19:283, 19:373, 19: 164-167.

of Kufa, was enraged by Zaynab's speech, he is placated by the words of his follower Amr bin Hurayth: "She is only but a woman. Are women to be responsible for anything that they speak?" Thus, even the strength of Zaynab's words are removed from her own control. Zaynab herself assents to this view, according to Tabari, when she scoffs at praise, "What has a woman to do with bravery."[64] Al-Tabari does include two of Zaynab's famed speeches along the journey to Karbala, but he does not discuss at length the most charged of her speeches directed against Yazīd in the Umayyad court in Damascus.[65] After their return to Medina, however, little is said of Zaynab's life in al-Tabari's history; it is in his own account of his time in Cairo that he notes Zaynab traveled there at the end of her life and passed away of natural causes in Egypt. Few early sources highlight the circumstances of Zaynab's death in great detail, though records of visitation to both sites existed.[66] Most purely Shi'a accounts that developed in later centuries would differ from this narrative, instead emphasizing that she returned in sorrow to Damascus and likely died there soon after.[67]

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[64] Al-Tabari, *Tarīkh al-Rusūl,* 19:165-66.

[65] Al-Tabari also quotes Abu Mikhnaf, an 8th century historian, who declared that Husayn reminded his followers, "It is not for women to fight." Al-Tabari, 19:131.

[66] Other famed writers mentioned the grave in Egypt, including the Egyptian religious scholar Jalaludin al-Sayuti (d. 1505). Aliaa El Sandouby has focused on the history of *Ahl al-Bayt* shrines in Cairo, particularly the architectural patronage given to such sites as the Sayyeda Zaynab shrine. See Aliaa El Sandouby, "The Ahl al-bayt in Cairo and Damascus: The Dynamics of Making Shrines for the Family of the Prophet," (PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2009).

[67] Field notes, interview with Maulana Hussein Zaynabi, March 10, 2012, Damascus. Zaynabi was the head of a local *hawza* at the Sayyeda Zaynab and had studied extensively in Najaf and Qom. He notes that while texts focused on Zaynab increased at the end of the 19th century, it was in 20th century hagiographies and instruction manuals for *majlis* reciters that a greater emphasis was placed on the tragedy of her return and death in Damascus. Interestingly, modern sources differ on Zaynab's date of death, depending on which narrative they accept. Shi'a sources note that Zaynab died during the month of Safar, the second month during which Shi'as continue to commemorate the tragedy of Karbala. Historiographies that place her grave in Egypt give the date of the 15th of Rajab. The latter date "separates her death from the tragedies of Karbala." See "The holy shrine of Zainab [A.S.] in Damascus," *Ja'fari Observer* 6 (4): 21-24.

Al-Tabari's chronicle was one of the earliest accounts of Karbala, though its focus was primarily on the development of politics and religious authority in early Islam. Two Shi'a accounts would build and embellish on the history laid out by al-Tabari and become the source for emotive mourning narratives and public sermons commemorating Karbala: Shaykh al-Mufīd's (d. 1022) *Kitab al-irshād* in Arabic and Mullah Husayn Waiz Kāshifi's (d. 1505) *Rawdat al-shuhadā*, written in Persian. A detailed biography of the 14 Infallibles – Muhammad, his daughter Fatima, and the 12 Shi'a Imams – *Kitab al-ishād* was written by the renowned traditionalist scholar Shaykh al-Mufīd during the Shiite Buwayhid dynasty. The accounts of Zaynab in *Kitab al-irshād* are brief, and while they allude to her exemplary standing through her relation to the infallibles, they are mostly interspersed through the retelling of the lives of the other Imams. In al-Mufīd's telling, Zaynab often lost heart on the plains of Karbala and "struck at her face and cried out in grief."[68] When the time came for Husayn to prepare for battle, she tore at her garments and was so overcome that she "fell down in a faint."[69] Zaynab herself was not infallible, nor portrayed at the same level of piety as all her family, for her open expression of grief was a reflection of some doubt in Allah's will. Among al-Mufīd's prominent students, including the preeminent Shi'a theologian Shaykh al-Tusi, this depiction would take hold amongst Arabic writings of the traditionalist school.

But it would be in the Persian *Rawdat al-shuhadā* that the more lavish Karbala narratives would be recorded. Written by Husayn Waiz Kāshifi, a well-known literary figure of the fifteenth century, *Rawdat al-shuhadā* would become one of the most

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[68] Mohammad al-Mufīd, *Kitab al-irshād,* trans. I.K.A Howard, (Qom: Tahrike Tarsile Qur'an, 1981), 40.
[69] Al-Mufīd, *Kitab al-irshād,* 52.

influential Shi'a commemorative texts, transforming an Arab-centric narrative into an accessible and emotionally impactful Persian anthology dealing with the sufferings of the prophets and the martyrs of Karbala.[70] In her analysis of how changing portrayals of Fatima bint Muhammad provide an insight into evolving values, both in the Shi'a community at large and in male expectations of ideal Shia womanhood, historian Firoozeh Kashani Sabet has noted that Kāshifi's version of the Fatima legend is connected to "his desire to validate the uniqueness of Ali and the lawful claim of the Shi'ite Imams to the leadership of the Muslim community after the Prophet's death."[71] Kashani Sabet notes that while Kāshifi related narratives that did emphasize Fatima's acceptance of her father's will and her divine influence in affecting conversions, her most frequent depiction was still of "a weeping and emotionally fragile woman."[72] Though a

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[70] The genre of books concerning the martyrdom of saints by political authorities is called *maqtal* (pl. *maqātil*) in Arabic literature. While many early Karbala narratives were initially volumes of larger historical chronicles, by the 16th century, a separate genre had emerged, as these works were often recited publically in commemoration and had particular significance. See Said Amir Arjomand, "Popular Eulogy of the Imams" in *Authority and Political Culture in Shi'sim* (New York: SUNY Press, 1988). Such was the popular impact of *Rawdat al-shuhadā* that it was often recited verbatim in public commemorations; those who had memorized and delivered recitations came to be know as *rawda-khwān* (reciters of the *Rawdā*). It was the impetus for the development of the *ta'ziyeh,* Shi'a passion plays, and formed the basis of popular Shi'ism in Iran, Shi'a India, and Southern Lebanon. Kāshifi's text would be the source of centuries of popular and literary recounts of Karbala. See Abbas Amanat, "*Meadow of the Martyrs:* Kāshifi's Persianization of the Shi'i Martyrdom Narrative in the Late Tīmūrid Heart" in *Culture and Memory in Medieval Islam: Essays in Honor of Wilfred Madelung,* eds. Wilfred Madelung, Farhad Daftary, Joseph Meri (London: I.B. Taurus, 2002).

[71] Firoozeh Kashani Sabet, "Who is Fatima? Gender, Culture, and Representation in Islam," *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (Spring 2005), 8. Kashani Sabet has traced the portrait of Fatima from Kāshifi's work, through the Qajar and Pahlavi period to Ali Shari'ati's *Fatima is Fatima* lectures delivered in 1971 on the anniversary of her birth. She notes the absence of Fatima from official women's movements or discourse versus the popularity she has for the Shi'a as a model of piety to emulate. While Kāshifi's legend of Fatima is a product of the social milieu of the 16th century, Kashani Sabet argues that Shari'ati's construct of Fatima is equally embedded in the context of pre-revolutionary Islam and Shari'ati's views on socialism, Islam, and revolution.

[72] *ibid,* "Fatima is Fatima," 10.

source of emulation for her piety and submissive behavior as a woman, Fatima's life was ultimately a validation of the Shi'a Imamate. Similarly, Zaynab's suffering is but another element that compounded the injustices that Husayn endured before his martyrdom. The vivid descriptions of the tragedies of Karbala that befell Zaynab are ultimately to incite grief for Husayn, because "whoever sheds tears for Husayn…he is bound to enter Paradise."[73] The women in these narratives, while displaying admirable traits of idealized female behavior, existed primarily to support the claims of the male Shi'a Imams and martyrs. Kāshifi's text in particular would be widely transmitted and translated across the Shi'a world, and his dramatic and evocative style provided the richest Karbala source material for generations. As such, for centuries Kāshifi's depictions would be deeply influential amongst *ulama* and orators delivering sermons on Karbala, including historians commissioned in the Qajar period.[74]

Nasir al-Din Shah Qajar's patronage of historical writings included the lengthy *Nasikh al-Tawarikh* by Muhammad Taqi Sipihr (*Lisan al Mulk*). First commissioned during Muhammad Shah's reign, *Nasikh al-Tawarikh* was to cover world history, though primarily linked to the story of Shi'ism as Nasir al-Din positioned himself as the defender of the faith. *Nasikh al-Tawarikh* was the most comprehensive source to date on the specifics of Zaynab's life, containing increasing illusions to her divinity and comparisons to Hassan and Husayn. In this account, the Prophet used to put his tongue in the mouth of Zaynab like he did with Hassan and Husayn to suckle them when they were thirsty. Like Hassan and Husayn, Zaynab was divinely named, as the angel Gabriel descended to

[73] Husayn Wa'iz al-Kāshifi, *Rawdat al-shuhada'* (Tehran: Kitab forooshi-e-Islamiyah, 1979),12.
[74] Muhammad Taqi Sipihr, *Nasikh al-Tawarikh* (Tehran: Kitab forooshi-e-Islamiyah, 1982), vol. VI, 370. For more, see Abbas Amanat, *Pivot of the Universe: Nasir al-Din Shah Qajar and the Iranian Monarchy, 1831-1896* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

Fatima and 'Ali's home. Thus, by the turn of the 20th century, Kāshifi's work remained the most prevalent basis of the dominant Shi'a narratives about Karbala.

The Modernizer's Zaynab

In 1935, Syed Muhsin al-Amīn's multi-volume manifesto *A'yān al-Shi'ah* signaled a pronounced shift in depictions of Sayyeda Zaynab, heavily influenced by al-Amīn's social viewpoints and political environment. Al-Amīn was one of the most influential of the Lebanese *marja'* from Jabal Amil, a reformist cleric who completed his religious instruction in Najaf and returned to Damascus to guide the Shi'a community to increasing prominence during the French mandate.[75] Despite his roots in Lebanon, it was in Damascus where Al-Amīn found his largest base of support as the only unquestioned *marja'* of a Shi'a community yet to coalesce into an assertive community under Ottoman and colonial rule.[76] Al-Amīn's demands for the protection of Shi'a *waqf* properties and his support for the expansion of the Sayyeda Zaynab shrine were deeply tied to his attempts to regulate Shi'a mourning and commemoration rituals vis-à-vis the colonial state and other religious communities. Al-Amīn's preoccupation with appropriate religious and social behavior and creating a 'modernist' Shi'a community extended to his depiction of Sayyeda Zaynab. His debates on reforming Muharram rituals, for example, included opposition to overwrought and vocal female emotional responses. According to historian Max Weiss, al-Amīn believed that women "should not 'scream' within earshot

[75] For more details in Syed Musin al-Amīn's life before his return to Damascus, see Fouad Ajami, *The Vanished Imam: Musa Sadr and the Shi'a of Lebanon* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press: 1987), 76-84.
[76] Sabrina Mervin, "Ashura: Some Remarks on Ritual Practices in Different Shiite Communities (Lebanon and Syria)" in *The Other Shiites: From the Mediterranean to Central Asia*, edited by Alessandro Monsutti, Silvia Naef and Farian Sabahi (London: Peter Lang AG, 2007), 138-141.

of 'foreign men'; screaming is described as 'ugly'…Muhsin al-Amīn relocated that honor within her subdued and modest behavior in religious ritual."[77] Perhaps ironically, this caution against women's vocal role in mourning can be directly tied to a portrayal of Sayyeda Zaynab that emphasized her forbearance and patience in the face of great hardship on the plains of Karbala, surrounded by 'foreign' and enemy foes. In Muhsin al-Amīn's depiction, no longer was Zaynab crying out, striking her face, and collapsing in grief, a narrative that had held since al-Mufīd and Kāshifi's work. Instead, Zaynab accepted the divinely ordained events, willingly sacrificing her two sons, and even helping to suit Husayn for battle.[78] As Husayn rode out to battle, alone against the growing forces of Yazīd, Zaynab could not yet bear the separation and emerged from the tents to the top of a small hill to watch the fighting below. Alone and surrounded by his enemies, Husayn cried out, "Is there no one here to come to my aid?" Heartbroken, Zaynab was tempted to fling herself to her brother's aid, but she restrained herself, for her time had not yet come.[79]

Al-Amīn's Zaynab was also quoted for her virtue and memorization and understanding of the Qurān, as she was raised in a most holy house, where the Qurān was the basis for all knowledge and advice dispensed. Before Karbala, she too was considered an authority in religious instruction; along the route to Damascus as a prisoner, Zaynab was said to have recited and responded to insults with verses praising the Prophet and his family and condemning the unbelievers.[80] Notably, Muhsin al-Amīn himself helped

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[77] Weiss, *In the Shadow of Sectarianism,* 82.
[78] Syed Muhsin al-Amīn al-Amili, *A'yān al-Shi'ah* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiya, 1963), vol. 7:140.
[79] al-Amīn, *'Ayān al- Shi'ah*, vol. 1:609-610.
[80] Al-Amīn, *Ay'ān al-Shi'ah*, 39:90-96.

found several schools for Shi'a youth in Damascus, where a lack of proper Shi'a instruction was seen as a source of the community's lack of coherence and progress, as students would continue their education in the Muslim Sunni schools of Damascus.[81] Among al-Amīn's new schools was one for girls to focus on Qurānic instruction, a reformist step that would later be praised by Iranian ideologues Jalāl Āl-I Ahmad and Ali Shari'ati for tackling the lack of modern education that had doomed Shi'a communities to backwardness.[82] Muhsin al-Amīn's ideological commitment to a reformed Shi'a community in the Levant and his influence as an unquestioned *marja'* in Damascus created a new Zaynab: fully versed in the Qurān, not fearful of Allah's will, firm in her sacrifice and knowledge. Al-Amīn's religious and political support for the expansion and development of Zaynab's shrine cannot be separated from his theological perspective. Indeed, his biography included his belief that Zaynab had returned to a small town named Rawiya, outside of Damascus, at the end of her life and was likely buried at the current gravesite, a belief manifested in his *fatwas* to back the efforts to grow the shrine. Yet for al-Amīn the debate over her grave was less critical than the creation of a site that marked the *Ahl al-Bayt* in Damascus, separate from the conflicting dynamics of history of the Umayyad mosque site. It would be a shrine whose religious import rivaled older Shi'a sites, a space where his particular theological rationale on appropriate Karbala mourning rituals could gain traction. His reverence of Zaynab as an exemplary figure who deserved

[81] Kais M. Firro, "The Shi'is in Lebanon: Between Communal 'Asabiyya and Arab Nationalism, 1908-21," *Middle Eastern Studies,* Vol. 42, No. 4 (Jul. 2006), 540.
[82] Houchang Chehabi, *Distant Relations: Iran and Lebanon in the Last 500 Years* (London: I.B. Taurus, 2005), 12.

a shrine worthy of her standing would end with his own burial in the courtyard of the Sayyeda Zaynab after his death in 1952.[83]

(Figure 1.1: Funeral of Syed Muhsin al-Amīn)

Al-Amīn's work, though ostensibly revealing a 'new' 20th century discourse on Zaynab's education and strength of character, was still a decidedly male perspective. Indeed, al-Amīn's particular characterization of Zaynab stemmed in part from unease with female participation in the patriarchy of Shi'a religious space and the colonial

[83] *Tashyi'i al-Marhūm al-Syed al-Amīn fi Sahn al-Sayyeda Zaynab Alayhā as-salām: taliy'ah mawkib janāzah al-Marhūm al-Syed Muhsin al-Amīn fi Damishq*. Photograph. From Majma' al-Sayyeda Zaynab li al-Ma'lūmāt wa al-Abhāth, Murtadha Family Private Papers, Sitt Zaynab, Syria. [Figure 1.1]

sphere. The concern over who Zaynab was and what her shrine meant was emblematic of the confines of colonial discourse. In her work *Colonial Citizens*, historian Elizabeth Thompson has argued that women became a site of conflict in the Mandatory period, and keeping the question of women's status subordinate was a way to alleviate tensions between various groups. According to Thompson, the destabilization of male authority and the transformation of female roles had created a crisis of paternity, and reaffirming gender hierarchies helped mitigate otherwise uncontrollable social tensions.[84] Thompson's emphasis on the intersection of gender, class, and sect provide a unique lens into the colonial and mandatory social relations and how these structures translated into the independent Syrian state. It also, however, reveals how control over defining a female shrine would fit the particular power dynamics in Mandatory Syria. For al-Amīn, the importance of Zaynab and her re-imagining was not in the challenge to traditional gender roles; indeed, while it provided a new approach to Zaynab's behavior at Karbala and beyond, it paradoxically stemmed from gendered power dynamics and physical control of the shrine. Zaynab's strength came in part from her silence and restraint in the face of great trauma.

Yet his position among Shi'a *ulama* and his endorsement of a shrine in Damascus would create momentum behind the Sayyeda Zaynab, and his conservative modernist discourse on Zaynab would sacralize the shrine. *Ulama* and Shi'a religious leaders would implicitly endorse this view in their hagiographies of Zaynab, though would internalize the same gender constructions that marked al-Amīn's writings. The Najafi *shaykh* and

[84] Elizabeth Thompson, *Colonial Citizens: Republican Rights, Paternal Privilege, and Gender in French Syria and Lebanon* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000).

judge, Muhammad Ja'far al-Naqdi, in his 1943 hagiography *Zaynab al-Kubra*, notes that Zaynab's early life was defined by privacy and silence. Al-Naqdi relates one of the few *hadith* that mention Zaynab at a younger age and records that 'Ali's neighbor claimed, "I never heard the voice of Zaynab, nor saw her, although I was living but next door."[85] Zaynab's whole life was influenced by Fatima and 'Ali's will, according to al-Naqdi, to such an extent that one of the conditions of Zaynab's wedding to Abdullah bin Ja'far was that she would be permitted a daily visit to Husayn and that she would never be prevented from going on a journey with him.[86] Al-Naqdi's focus remains primarily on a renewed emphasis on Zaynab's piety and closeness to God. At a young age, according to al-Naqdi, Zaynab even astonished 'Ali with her single-minded devotion to God. 'Ali once tested Zaynab on her faith in the *tawhīd,* or oneness of God, al-Naqdi narrates. When Zaynab was a young child,

> As Zaynab was sitting on 'Ali's lap, he asked her to say '*wahīd*' and Zaynab replied 'one.' Then 'Ali prompted her to say '*ithnān'* but Zaynab would not say 'two.' 'Ali asked her why, and Zaynab responded, 'My father, the tongue that has said '*wahīd*' shall never say two.' 'Ali hugged and kissed her, content in her faith in Allah.[87]

Her faith and standing in the eyes of Allah were so great, according to al-Naqdi, that on the night before his death Husayn requested that Zaynab specifically pray for him during her nightly *Tahajjud* prayers, because no other prayers would reach Allah so powerfully.[88] It was this ability to intercede for devotees that would become a critical argument in the expansion of her gravesite, already undertaken by an alliance of local notables and Shi'a religious leaders. By the outbreak of WWII, the theological arguments

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[85] Muhammad J'afar Naqdi, *Ḥayāt Zaynab Al-Kubra* (Qum: Maktabat Al-Mufīd, 1362), 22.
[86] Al-Naqdi, *Zaynab al-Kubra*, 204.
[87] Al-Naqdi, *Zaynab al-Kubra,* 256.
[88] Al-Naqdi, *Zaynab al-Kubra,* 58.

were emerging to establish the importance of a shrine to Zaynab bint 'Ali that befitted her lineage, her relationship to Husayn, ties to the infallibles, piety and knowledge – albeit couched in a conservative language espoused by male Shi'a religious authorities. For these Shi'a *ulama*, a position that stressed the spiritual equality and importance of Zaynab was not synonymous with one that challenged her role outside the confines of family. In her seminal work *Women and Gender in Islam,* Leila Ahmed has argued that Islam itself contains these two divergent messages within its texts and *hadith*: the 'ethical' message that emphasized the moral and spiritual equality of all humans that Islam ensured, often overshadowed by the 'sexual hierarchy', which has privileged men and prevailed. It was the latter that had found its way into the formulation of laws and institutions.[89] Similarly, these dichotomous instincts would be present in hagiographies of Zaynab that posited her emotional control and quiet piety as a sign of her equality.

A Women's Saint

A generation of female writers, primarily Egyptian, would reconstruct the entirety of her life and fashion Zaynab into an quasi-feminist Islamic role model and nationalist icon. Their image of Zaynab would create a new legendary figure, a pious, wise, and fearless companion who was capable of political maneuvering when called upon, even through personal grief; that portrayal, however, was inextricably tied to a commitment to Zaynab as a patron saint of Egypt, a nationalist icon who was buried in Cairo after traveling to *Misr* to escape persecution in Medina. In 1966, Aisha 'Abd al-Rahman

[89] Leila Ahmad, *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).

published a hagiography of Zaynab entitled *Batalat Karbala: Zaynab bint al-Zahrā*, part of a widely read and acclaimed series of biographies on the women of the Prophet's household. 'Abd al-Raman was among the generation of prominent of Egyptian women academics and writers of the 20th century and a respected Islamic scholar. Deeply influenced by the national currents of her time, 'Abd al-Rahman's particular gender and intellectual concerns would figure prominently in her portrayal of Zaynab. Born in 1913 in the coastal town of Dimyat, her rural experience would remain a prevalent influence throughout her writings, especially in her novels and short stories penned under the name Bint al'Shāti'.[90] Her mother was a descendant of a former shaykh of Al-Azhar, the preeminent institution of Islamic learning, and her father, Shaykh Muhammad 'Ali 'Abd al-Rahman, taught at a local religious school. He trained 'Abd al-Rahman in classical Arabic and the Qurān from a young age, despite his initial objections to her schooling, and left an indelible influence on her. *Batalat Karbala* was dedicated to her father; in the introduction she ruminates, "Your memory was in my mind with every word…you were speaking and I was writing."[91] It was through her father's influence that she was inspired to write the book, remembering an occasion from her childhood in the Islamic month of Rajab when her father was preparing to travel to Cairo for the *urs* of Zaynab, even as her mother had gone into labor. 'Abd al-Rahman reminisces that she and her sister Fatima begged him to cancel the trip, but her father sat her close to discuss the purpose of his

[90] For more on Bint al-Shāti's life, see Ruth Roded, "Bint al-Shati's 'Wives of the Prophet': Feminist or Feminine?" *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies,* Vol. 33, no. 1 (May, 2006), 51-66. Unlike the more elite women of Huda Sha'arawi's cadre of feminist advocates, 'Abd al-Rahman remained deeply engaged with questions of rural development and women's work.
[91] Aisha 'Abd al-Rahman Bint al-Shāti', *Batalat Karbala*: *Zaynab bint al-Zahrā* (Beirut: Dār al-Andalus, 1966), 10.

travel, explaining that "his presence at the *urs* of our Lady Zaynab was his duty."[92] Before departing, he instructed his wife that if the child was a daughter, her name must be Zaynab. Her father's reverence for the Prophet's family remained with her and would inspire her biographies on the women in the Prophet's life.

'Abd al-Rahman moved to Cairo and received her degree in Arabic Language and Literature at Cairo University in 1939, was an instructor of Arabic literature at various institutions, was appointed an inspector of Arabic Language in the Egyptian Ministry of Education in 1942, and obtained her PhD in 1950.[93] Most notably, she was the first Muslim woman to publish a full treatise on Qurānic exegesis (*tafsir*) and became famous for her *hadith* and Qurānic interpretation. In her time in Cairo, 'Abd al-Rahman would witness the growth of Egyptian nationalism and the new women's movements, and cross paths with the giants of the *Nahda*, the Arabic cultural and literary renaissance of the mid and late 20th century.[94] From Muhammad 'Abduh's Islamic reformism to Qāsim Amīn's nationalism and Huda Sha'rawi's pioneering movement for women's rights, the dynamic

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[92] 'Abd al-Rahman, *Batalat Karbala,* 4.
[93] Roded, "Bint al-Shati's 'Wives of the Prophet,'" 56.
[94] The histories of the *nahda,* the women's movements, and the Egyptian nationalists is an expansive topic, beyond the scope of this dissertation. Relevant readings on these topics, among others, include Qāsim Amīn, *The Liberation of Women and The New Woman* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2000); Beth Baron, *The Women's Awakening in Egypt: Culture, Society and the Press* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994) and *Egypt as Woman: Woman, Nationalism, Gender, and Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007); Margot Badran, *Feminists, Islam, and Nation: Gender and the Making of Modern Egypt* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995); Marilyn Booth, *May Her Likes Be Multiplied: Biography and Gender Politics in Egypt,* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001) and "Exemplary Lives, Feminist Aspirations: Zaynab Fawwāz and the Arabic Biographical Tradition" in *Journal of Arabic Literature*, Vol. 26, No. 1/2, The Quest for Freedom in Modern Arabic Literature (Mar. - Jun., 1995), 120-146; Joel Beinin and Zachary Lockman, *Workers on the Nile: Nationalism, Communism, Islam, and the Egyptian Working Class, 1882-1954* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987); Timothy Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Israel Gershoni and James Jankowski, *Egypt: Islam, and the Arabs: The Search for Egyptian Nationhood, 1900-1930* (London: Oxford University Press, 1987) and *Redefining the Egyptian Nation: 1930-1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

Egyptian milieu would be reflected in her work. Yet she herself would come to espouse a kind of Islamic conservative modernism, emphasizing a woman's right to education and work, but not at the expense of her role as a mother or in a marriage; indeed, 'Abd al-Rahman's own polygamous marriage would be one of the most defining relationships in her life. Unlike the more fundamentalist Islamists such as Zainab al-Ghazali who faced political oppression, however, Aisha 'Abd al-Rahman would be honored by Gamal Abdel Nasser for her particular concern with the conditions of Egyptian peasants, belief in equality consistent with Islamic values, and critiques of Al-Azhar policies.[95]

'Abd al-Rahman's histories of the women in the Prophet's life, including *Batalat Karbala*, were part of an emerging women's biographical tradition in Arab literature that had previously been the domain of male authors. Her own personal experiences and ideological perspective would influence her portrayal of Zaynab as an Islamic paragon for the modern woman – especially for the modern Egyptian woman seeking to define herself in a time of intellectual and political pressures. 'Abd al-Rahman would deliberately not call herself a feminist and advocated an understanding of the Islamic models of ideal women.[96] 'Abd al-Rahman's source work in *Batalat Karbala* is rich with references to *hadith* and religious tracts to authenticate the history. Yet she acknowledges that it is not "pure history" but also not pure legend; instead, it is her account of the role

[95] Margot Badran, "Competing Agenda: Feminists, Islam, and the Sate in 19th and 20th Century Egypt," in *Women, Islam & the State*, ed. Deniz Kandiyoti (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), 219.

[96] In an address she deliver at Sant' Egidio Conference in Padua, Italy, in 1997 Bint al-Shāti' would remark, "Let us give unbridled praise to God, Glory be to Him, for what he has done for us females: for he has bestowed upon us, believing women of unblemished reputation, protection of our honor and dignity from falsehood, calumny and detraction." A'isha bint al-Shati Abd al-Rahman, "Islam and the New Woman" in *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics*, No. 19, Gender and Knowledge: Contribution of Gender Perspectives to Intellectual Formations, (1999), 194-202.

and status of Zaynab in Islamic history. Zaynab's primary role was to be raised as a virtuous daughter, mother, and sister, but when her involvement in violent political conflict was unavoidable, she distinguished herself as an exemplar of knowledge, strength, and devotion. Notably, 'Abd al-Rahman chose to identify Zaynab through her maternal lineage in the title as the daughter of Fatima, not the daughter of 'Ali, as was convention. Zaynab was thus directly associated with the unimpeachable character of Fatima, the Prophet's devoted and only surviving child and the universally revered and female exemplar of Islam. In 'Abd al-Rahman's account, when 'Ali informed his daughter about what was to come at Karbala, she replied that Fatima had already prepared her. It was her mother's last instructions, or *wasiyat*, that she was to never leave her brother's side, because Zaynab's role was now as his mother after Fatima's death.[97]

Like 'Abd al-Rahman, Zaynab was a Qurānic scholar who taught the women of Medina and would give religious instruction; indeed, according to 'Abd al-Rahman, Zaynab was "raised in the cradle of knowledge, surrounded by the Prophet's companions."[98] 'Ali paid close attention to Zaynab's upbringing, instructing her in religion, Qurānic exegesis, and morals – much like 'Abd al-Rahman's own father. 'Abd al-Rahman affirms the pre-destination of Karbala, but also takes pains to describe Zaynab's preparation for the tragedies and the hardiness she had already exhibited leading up to Husayn's death. She explains, "I have started this work from Zaynab's infancy to illustrate the extent of her suffering and tragedies, from the cradle to the last

[97] Abd al-Rahman, *Batalat Karbala,* 18.
[98] 'Abd al-Rahman, *Batalat Karbala,* 25.

moments of her life."[99] Fatima's grief and anger after Muhammad's death for the rights that were taken away from her, the *ummah*'s treatment of 'Ali, the "painful sight" of the Prophet's companion 'Umar forcing entry into Fatima's home to demand 'Ali pledge his allegiance to the new caliph Abu Bakr – while she was a passive observer of these events, they would all make Zaynab accustomed to grief at a young age.[100] They prepared Zaynab for what she would face at Karbala, so when the time came she was able to bear the events with full understanding of divine will. According to 'Abd al-Rahman, at Karbala on the night before *Ashura*, Husayn awoke from a sleep and informed Zaynab that he dreamt of their grandfather, the Prophet, who told him that the time had come that Husayn would soon be returning to him. Zaynab let out a cry and slapped her face, but Husayn reminded her that she was the granddaughter of the Prophet and that they had been prepared for this moment. Quoting Zayn al-'Abidīn, 'Abd al-Rahman writes that Zaynab lamented that she too could not sacrifice herself for her family, who would all be gone by the end of the day.[101] She similarly emphasizes Zaynab's role as the central family figure, noting that all the martyrs' bodies were brought to her for her to weep over and sacralize their sacrifice, as "she was as the mother to them all. She gave comfort and mourned for all those that had no one left to mourn for them."[102] The focus on Zaynab as a mother figure during the battle reflected 'Abd al-Rahman's own critique of the early vanguard of the women's movement in Egypt. "Our failure to recognize the true value of the mother's great role was a major stumbling block in the early stages of the movement,

[99] 'Abd al-Rahman, *Batalat Karbala,* 9.
[100] 'Abd al-Rahman, *Batalat Karbala,* 22.
[101] 'Abd al-Rahman, *Batalat Karbala,* 42.
[102] 'Abd al-Rahman, *Batalat Karbala,* 40.

for which our generation paid a terrible price," she noted in a speech soon before her death in 1997.[103]

'Abd al-Rahman quotes numerous poets and narrators who relate that Zaynab did not leave her brother for one breath at Karbala, but it was only after his death that she exerted her will over the political situation. 'Abd al-Rahman builds on al-Amīn's portrayal of Zaynab's grief after Karbala, as she is depicted as drawing strength and composure in her time as a prisoner. Those that heard Zaynab's *khutba* in Kufa and before Yazīd swore "it was as if 'Ali had returned and was speaking before them, in the same delivery and words."[104] She rendered the people of Kufa to tears in their shame; when the caravan returned to Medina she continued to speak out on the events of Karbala so that the memory of the injustices would stay alive. The governor of Medina wrote to Yazīd to warn him that Zaynab was inciting rebellion, and in fear of reprisal the residents of Medina requested that she leave the city. According to 'Abd al-Rahman, Zaynab prayed to Allah that He would send her somewhere where she would finally find peace in her old age. 'Abd al-Rahman writes, "She left the home of grandfather and the graves of her family and arrived by the Nile, a strange land where she had neither friend nor relative."[105] A group of shaykhs and members of the court met Zaynab and brought her to Cairo, where she was given shelter, peace, and was buried with respect near the home where she last lived. 'Abd al-Rahman notes that after a lifetime of political and religious tribulations, chased out of her homeland, Zaynab was finally received by a people who gave her the honor accorded to the granddaughter of the Prophet and Husayn's sister.

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[103] 'Abd al-Rahman, "Islam and the New Woman", 198.
[104] 'Abd al-Rahman, *Batalat Karbala,* 59.
[105] 'Abd al-Rahman, *Batalat Karbala,* 72.

'Abd al-Rahman quotes notable historical figures as evidence for her presence in Cairo, including historian Shams al-Din al-Sakhawi's *Al-Tuhfah al-latīfah fi Tarīkh al-Madinah al-Sharīfah* and Sufi scholar Abd al-Wahhab al-Sharani's *Al-Tabaqāt al-Kubra*. For Bint al-Shāti's, Zaynab was a source of emulation for women – a pious Muslim, a devoted wife, mother, and sister, well versed in the Qurān and *hadith*, but still able to exert great influence in the political arena when the situation arose – and a national icon.

'Abd al-Rahman's emphasis that Zaynab fled to Cairo because of the great love that the people of *Misr* held for the *Ahl al-Bayt* and that Zaynab died a natural and peaceful death there was the account supported by popular Egyptian narratives and the preeminent Sunni scholars of Al-Azhar. The Sayyeda Zaynab shrine in Cairo had been a revered site of worship for centuries, and Zaynab herself had become a popular saint in public consciousness and Egyptian literature.[106] While the vast majority of Shi'a Muslims claimed Damascus as the spot of Zaynab's grave, the Sayyeda Zaynab shrine in Cairo had a long history of public ritual and political patronage. 'Abd al-Rahman notes that the mosque was rebuilt by Muhammad 'Ali, considered the founder of modern Egypt; 'Ali Pasha Mubarak, the influential Egyptian Minister of Education and of Public Works under the Ottoman Empire, also lived near and frequented the Sayyeda Zaynab mosque. At the time of the publication of *Batalat al-Karbala*, Gamal Abdel Nasser had undertaken new renovations of the mosque, coinciding with the Syrian expansion at the Sayyeda Zaynab shrine in Damascus.[107] The Sayyeda Zaynab mosque in Cairo was a site of

[106] For more on the devotional and literary engagement with the Sayyeda Zaynab mosque in Cairo see Nadia Abu-Zahra, *The Pure and the Powerful: Studies in Contemporary Muslim Society* (Berkshire: Ithaca Press, 1997).
[107] Gihan Shahine, "Here she lies buried," *Al-Ahram Weekly,* 18-24 November 1999. 'Abd al-Rahman herself acknowledged the differing accounts of Zaynab's burial site as part of the

unparalleled national and Islamic significance, ‘Abd al-Rahman noted, a shrine that had been visited by pilgrims for centuries and should only continue to grow; certainly, her influential and extensive hagiography of Zaynab would further sacralize the site and tie narrative, history, and sacred geography together onto the space of the shrine.

While *Batalat Karbala* would deviate from some of the central components of Shi’a hagiography, ‘Abd al-Rahman’s extensive text on Zaynab would become the basis on which newly assertive hagiographies of her life were written. Many would take pains to challenge her allegedly faulty historical conclusions that Zaynab would end up in Cairo, even as her legend of Zaynab would permeate new hagiographies in interesting ways. Notably, while the de-veiling of Zaynab and the violation of her virtue was perhaps the central tragedy in Shi’a hagiography before the publication of *Batalat Karbala* and the most defining lens through which Zaynab was viewed, ‘Abd al-Rahman devotes significantly less attention to this trauma in her text. While it was certainly one of the indignities Zaynab suffered, as it was done without her consent, the lack of veil did not figure prominently in her discussion of Zaynab’s travels from Karbala to Damascus. ‘Abd al-Rahman herself did not wear a veil or *hijab* through much of her public life, even refusing the insistence of Al-Azhar shaykhs that she cover her head at a large public address there in 1959.[108] The de-emphasis on Zaynab’s veil by a female writer in this time

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challenges of the historical record of early Islamic history, specifically as it related to the history of women. She notes, “Among the progeny of the Prophet, there are many females of the household whose dates of death and history are not known, because they were kept in veil and protected, and their sacred graves were not marked so they would not be desecrated or part of unlawful behavior.”

[108] For more on Bint al-Shāti’s complex views on veiling see Mervat Hatem, “A’isha Abdel Rahman, An Unlikely Heroine: A Post-Colonial reading of Her Life and Some of Her Biographies of Women in the Prophetic Household,” *Journal of Middle East Women’s Studies*,

period, with the growth of secular and women's movements, is certainly understandable given the historical context of this hagiography. But 'Abd al-Rahman's de-emphasis on Zaynab's unveiling would also translate in Shi'a hagiographies into more powerful articulations of Zaynab's strength post-Karbala. While in Shi'a hagiographies the forced removal of her veil would remain a major sin committed by the Umayyad forces, Zaynab would react in a more defiant manner. No longer would she be cowed and grieved by the loss of her veil. Instead, Zaynab would emerge stronger for the loss, with the removal of her veil signifying her transformation into an 'Ali-like figure. Indeed, since the mid-20th century and 'Abd al-Rahman's hagiography, for many Shi'as the importance of Karbala has been in the reinterpretation of Zaynab's behavior. According to anthropologist Lara Deeb in her work on the Shi'a community in Beirut, "representations that had depicted Zaynab as a plaintive mourner were transformed to renderings that accentuated her courage, strength, and resilience…It is Zaynab who carries the history of *Ashura* forward to future generations of Shi'i Muslims."[109] Her role would thus grow in prominence. She would be positioned as a close extension of the 14 infallible Shi'a figures, molded to embody their same qualities, and visitation to her shrine in Damascus would be positioned to equal and rival that of Karbala or Najaf.

'Abd al-Rahman's portrayal of Zaynab would mirror similar moves to shift and appropriate discourses about Zaynab and a growing Shi'a consciousness and affiliation with her life. The remembrance and recitations of lamentations for Zaynab were common themes in private female ritual practice, especially in female-only gatherings

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Vol. 7, No. 2 (Spring 20011), 1-26. She would eventually wear the *hijab* in 1970, but still rejected it as an ideological and theological tool condemning women to private life.

[109] Lara Deeb, *An Enchanted Modern: Gender and Pubic Piety in Shi'i Lebanon* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 148-150.

commemorating the events of *Ashura*. While the segregation of male and female mourning practices in public was the most common experience, women were still present at the margins of these rituals, quietly observing, preparing meals, and providing logistical support. Yet through the 1960s, women became more visible in public mourning rituals and in their engagement with Zaynab. In particular, older texts and narratives were given new life in the public sphere in places like India and Pakistan, with prominent female performers reciting *marsiyas* through popular media. While the words of these texts were written in the 19th century, they were given a new resonance when performed by female voices and widely disseminated through radio and public television recordings. Famed classical singers of India and Pakistan, including Noor Jahan, Lata Mangeshkar, and Kajjan Begum, performed *Ghabraye Gi Zaynab* for wide audiences. The classic elegiac poem elaborated on the fear that Zaynab felt on the night of the 10th of Muharram, after all her male companions had been killed and the camps of the women set on fire. While male orators had long performed the *marsiya*, the increasing adaptation of these verses into the female voice changed the emotive power of the words. Women publicly identifying and mourning with Zaynab, owning her pain as their own, heads covered but voices raised, even as they lamented her fear at the loss of her veil, represented a new paradigm. The words were unchanged, describing Zaynab's helplessness, yet these performances represented a new public appropriation and widespread affiliation with Zaynab's life. As anthropologist Saba Mahmood noted in her work on the women's piety movement in the mosques in Cairo, the prospect of women speaking in the same 'language' as men or for the same purposes had led her to wonder why on the surface "such a large number of women across the Muslim world actively

support a movement that seems inimical to their own interests and agendas."[110] Yet as with the women's piety movement, these women's active engagement with this language changed the very meaning of the discourse, and these female performers speaking the same words on Zaynab did not mean passively accepting older narratives of her character. Indeed, according to scholar Diane D'Souza, women often find and create meaning within the larger structures of power of which they are part.[111] Female performance of *marisya* in the 1960s specifically detailing Zaynab's ordeal created a heightened awareness of the importance of the female voice in Karbala rituals and illustrated an increasing transnational interest in Sayyeda Zaynab.[112]

The Blood or the Message

Amidst the politicization and radicalization of Shi'a organizations in the 1970s, Zaynab's sacrifice was made equal to Husayn's as concerted efforts were undertaken to expand her shrine by transnational religious and political networks. Zaynab's actions at Karbala and beyond allowed women to internalize her defiance and construct a space in which they could articulate their independence as women.[113] Male religious and political leaders promulgated and seized on this interpretation of Zaynab as a metaphor for

[110] Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 2.
[111] Diane D'Souza, *Partners of Zaynab: A Gendered Perspective of Shi'a Muslim Faith* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2014), 9-11.
[112] See Shemeem Burney Abbas, *The Female Voice in Sufi Ritual: Devotional Practices of Pakistan and India* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010).
[113] See Kamran Scott Aghaie, ed. *The Women of Karbala: Ritual Performance and Symbolic Discourses in Modern Shi'i Islam* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005).

engaging women in 'acceptable' tropes of religious resistance and revolution.[114] The 1970s saw new rhetoric in the discussion of women in Shi'ism, as part of larger debates about the galvanization and appeal of Islam in the political sphere and the apparent failure of secular national leadership in the Middle East. In Lebanon, the leading Shi'a *mujtahid*, Musa al-Sadr, was widely seen as responsible for the politicization of a previously unorganized Shi'a community in Lebanon. After accepting a position as the leading Shi'a religious figure in Tyre, replacing the well-known Abd al-Husayn Sharif al-Dīn (d. 1957), al-Sadr would become a visible advocate for Shi'a political and economic representation and towering figure in Syrian and Lebanese politics.[115] Despite his energized efforts at reform and political representation for the Shi'a population, al-Sadr was a moderate, preferring to work within the construct of the political system and the nation-state paradigm to affect change. Similarly, al-Sadr would advocate for a more public role for women in the community and in education, although this participation was not to be at the expense of their roles as mothers and wives. In a speech on the role of women, al-Sadr noted that women such as Fatima and Zaynab had played a crucial and often public role in the early Islamic age. Al-Sadr noted that Zaynab was the one who spread the word of Karbala "from the heart of the desert to the capitals of the Muslim world, from Kufa to Hums to Hama to Aleppo to Baalbak and then Damascus."[116] Zaynab

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[114] Shaery Eisenlohr, *Shi'ite Lebanon: Transnational Religion and the Making of National Identities*.

[115] After the 'Alawī religious sect rose to prominence with the Ba'thist takeover in Syria, it was Musa al-Sadr who recognized the sect as part of the accepted orthodoxy of Shi'ism and legitimated support for their rule. For more on Musa al-Sadr's activities in Lebanon, see Adnan Fahs, *Al-Imam Musa al-Sadr: al-Sirah wa al-Fikr (Imam Musa al-Sadr: Life and Thought)* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr al-'Arabi, 1996).

[116] See "Dawr al-Mar'ah" (The Role of Women) in *Al-Imam Musa al-Sadr: al Rajul, al-Mawqif, al-Qadiyyah* (Beirut: Maktaba Sader, 1993), 150.

provided al-Sadr a model of strength and action that had transnational resonance, one that he could mold to fit his calls for a more assertive Shi'a community, yet his invocation of the most prominent cities of Lebanon and Syria grounded her in a national reality. Zaynab's historical presence in Damascus enhanced al-Sadr's engagement with sacred geography, as shrine authorities in Syria were similarly balancing appeals to transnational Shi'ism with an assertion of Arab heritage.

Thus the new focus on Zaynab provided the contours for reformists of the 1970s to reimagine her role, although al-Sadr's assertive portrayal of Zaynab never reached a truly radical one. Simultaneous to al-Sadr's activism in Lebanon, however, Ali Shari'ati, the Iranian intellectual and political activist would be painting a new image of Zaynab as fearless and true revolutionary. Shari'ati's radical interpretation of Shi'ism and impassioned opposition to the Shah had incited increasing discontent against the regime of Muhammad Reza Pahlavi. After his return from France in 1964, his lectures at the Hosseiniyeh Ershad, the institution he had hoped to position as the Shi'a rival to Al-Azhar, attracted growing thousands to his message of revolutionary 'Red Shi'ism.'[117] Shari'ati's dramatically new interpretations of gender roles, institutional *ulama* authority, and social reforms would also alienate significant portions of the clerical establishment in Iran.[118] Shari'ati would reinvigorate the Karbala narrative into a powerful and contemporary political motif about resistance against tyranny and fashion Zaynab as the twin face of Husayn's movement for justice. "One must choose: either blood or the message," Shari'ati had argued in a series of lectures on martyrdom at the Ershad and the

[117] Ali Rahnema, *An Islamic Utopian: A Political Biography of Ali Shari'ati* (London: I.B. Taurus, 2000), 102.
[118] Ervand Abrahamian, "Ali Shari'ati: Ideologue of the Iranian Revolution" *MERIP Reports,* No. 102, Islam and Politics (Jan., 1982), 24-28.

Masjid-e-Jami' in 1972. Husayn had accomplished martyrdom and chosen blood, but those who lived must live like Zaynab had, carrying on the message in the face of oppression and creating a lasting impact on human history.[119] According to historian Ali Rahnema, Shari'ati believed that "without the preacher of the message and the storyteller, history would have forgotten the blood and the sacrifice;" indeed, the role of the messenger in bringing to light injustice was one that Shari'ati himself had embraced.[120] But Shari'ati would also universalize Zaynab beyond just a female exemplar and elucidated more than just a reformist view of traditional gender dichotomies. Instead, for him Zaynab represented a particular paradigm that was accessible and inspirational to all involved in political struggle, to stand up against political oppression in the name of 'true' Islam and not be afraid to speak in public arenas against powerful authorities. Zaynab as an exemplary figure was no longer limited to her gender. In one of his most important lectures on the role of women in a true Islamic society, Shari'ati noted, "When Zaynab saw that the revolution had begun, she left her family, her husband and children, and joined the revolution. It was not for the sake of her brother Husayn, who was the leader of this revolution, that she joined it. She did so because of her own responsibility and commitment to her society, her religion and her God."[121] Unlike al-Naqdi, who portrayed Zaynab's journey to Karbala as stemming from duty and devotion to Husayn, Shari'ati argued that Zaynab made this choice as an individual, irrespective of her traditional or familial ties. In fact, according to Shari'ati, she sacrificed her traditional

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[119] Ali Shari'ati, *Martyrdom*, trans. Laleh Bakhtiar and Husayn Saleh (Tehran: Abu Dharr Foundation, 1972).
[120] Rahnema, 368.
[121] Ali Shari'ati, "Expectations from the Muslim Woman," in *Shariati on Shariati and the Muslim Woman*, trans. Laleh Bakhtiar (Chicago: Kazi Publications, 1996), 202.

role as a wife and mother in the face of the coming revolution, understanding that her mission for Islamic justice was too important to stay home. While her strength and courage were certainly unique in her circumstances, she represented the other side of two equal aspects to revolution, as both the physical and ideological struggle were central to Karbala. Indeed, Shari'ati himself had chosen the message, and his reverence for Zaynab made her an Islamic icon that transcended gendered affiliations. Yet this individualized Zaynab – one whose motivations and narrative existed even independent from Husayn's – provided the critical ideological and popular support for the growing interest in Zaynab's shrine, especially amongst Iranian Shi'a.

Confirming Sacred Space

At a time when transnational Shi'a activism was at its apex, these assertive portrayals of Zaynab bint 'Ali would be linked to a site where these ideas could be captured and galvanized, and where reverence for a figure of Zaynab's stature could be properly expressed. In 1979, as with Shi'a communities in Lebanon, Iraq, and Iran mobilized by the ongoing Lebanese Civil War and Iranian Revolution, a definitive hagiography and history of Zaynab's travels to Damascus was published. Written by Pakistani scholar Muhammad Hasanayn al-Sābiqi, *Marqad al-'Aqīlah Zaynab* was a text that reflected the new perception of Zaynab, growing transnational Shi'a networks, and the critical link between hagiography and shrine. Hailing from the Shi'a majority city of Quetta, Al-Sābiqi received his religious training from Najaf in the 1960s and was encouraged to write this book after witnessing the efforts of "men of high lineage" who had spent a decade traveling to the Iraqi shrine cities in their "blessed work to make a

greater shrine for Zaynab, the daughter of 'Ali, the Commander of the Faithful."[122] Al-Sābiqi's time in Najaf gave him a deep appreciation for the sacredness of the Shi'a shrines and the rewards that *ziyārat* bestowed upon the believer; as such, the righteous work being done by the Shi'as of Damascus who were actively promoting the Sayyeda Zaynab shrine were a significant blessing to the *ummah*, he commended.[123] Al-Sābiqi would move to Damascus in 1975 to continue his work at the *hawza* Zaynabiyya, the first seminary established in the Sayyeda Zaynab shrine. The *hawza* Zaynabiyya was founded by the Iraqi Syed Hassan Shirazi, part of the large and influential Shirazi family of Karbala that had been exiled by the Ba'ath regime.[124] Al-Sābiqi's movements from Pakistan, to Najaf, and then to the *hawza* Zaynabiyya in Damascus provide a microcosm for understanding the complex transnational religious alliances of the 1970s. Al-Sābiqi would also become Pakistan's national representative of Ayatollah Hassan al-Ihqāqi of Kuwait, who had welcomed the Shirazi exiles into the Gulf and supported them against Shi'a opponents.

Marqad al-Aqīlah Zaynab would receive official sanction from the Sayyeda Zaynab shrine as the 'authentic' history of Zaynab's life and death. Al-Sābiqi would draw on Shi'a hagiographies and historical chronicles to craft a narrative largely focused on the importance of '*al-Shām'* and the lengthy torment that Zaynab endured in Damascus. Al-Sābiqi would build on al-Naqdi's *Zaynab al-Kubra* and use 'Abd al-Rahman's *Batalat*

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[122] Muhammad Hasnayn al-Sābiqi, *Marqad al-'Aqīlah Zaynab: fī mīzān al-dirāsh wa al-tahqīq wa al-tahlīl* (Beirut, Mu'assasat al-A'lamī, 1979), 6.
[123] Al-Sābiqi, *Marqad al-'Aqīlah Zaynab,* 8.
[124] Hassan Shirazi and many from the powerful network were exiled from Iraq in the 1970s and would establish themselves across the Levant and in the Gulf. Laurence Louër, *Transnational Shi'a Politics: Religious and Political Networks in the Gulf* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 88-91.

Karbala to argue for the centrality of Zaynab in Shi'a history. Al-Sābiqi cites 'Abd al-Rahman's work to demonstrate the hardships that Zaynab endured at a young age to prepare her for Karbala, part of a theological commitment to the idea it was the final, predetermined test in a lifetime of persecution. But Al-Sābiqi builds on this, equating Zaynab's upbringing and standing among the *Ahl al-Bayt* as equal to her father and brothers. He narrates from multiple sources that it was encouraged early on by the Prophet that believers mourn for all of 'Ali and Fatima's children, not merely for Hassan or Husayn in their martyrdom. Al-Sābiqi notes, "Our believers do not remember that the Holy Prophet (SA) once said, 'To weep for the misfortunes of Zaynab is as to weep for her brothers, al-Hassan and al-Husayn."[125]

Interestingly, while 'Abd al-Rahman portrays a Zaynab that remained a supporting and largely family-oriented figure until the deaths at Karbala, al-Sābiqi's text emphasizes that she was given a comparative standing in the eyes of God from a young age. Al-Sābiqi invokes numerous *hadith* to substantiate the equality between Zaynab and her brothers. He quotes the 7th century account of Karbala written by the scholar Ibn Tawoos, in which the Prophet was to have said, "Oh 'Ali, verily your grave and the graves of your children are as parts of heaven, and verily from Allah's creatures he has turned the hearts of His chosen people towards you. Verily they will persevere through great hardships…to build [them] and they will visit your graves to come closer to their Lord… those who have constructed and repaired your graves will be like those who aided Solomon in building the temple in Jerusalem."[126] Al-Sābiqi argues that while this *hadith*

[125] Al-Sābiqi, *Marqad al-'Aqīlah Zaynab,* 22.
[126] Al-Sābiqi, *Marqad al-'Aqīlah Zaynab,* 77.

had long been used by scholars to support *ziyārat* to the shrines of the Imams, the Prophet did not merely limit his words to reference 'Ali's sons. Zaynab was one of the Prophet's own grandchildren and would play the defining role in continuing the message of Karbala. Thus, this *hadith* could be seen as a clear indication that Zaynab was included in Muhammad's prophecy.[127] He further notes that after the events of Karbala, Zayn al-Abidīn spent much of his life imprisoned or tightly guarded by Umayyad officials. Whatever knowledge came from Zayn al-Abidīn while he was imprisoned, al-Sābiqi claims, was hidden to protect the Imam's life by associating it with Sayyeda Zaynab. Only someone of knowledge and full piety could be entrusted to transmit the Imam's words and instructions without error.[128] While al-Sābiqi could not argue that Zaynab herself received divine instruction, as that was the realm of authority reserved solely for the Imams, it is through the purity of her body that the message can be transmitted, and a sacred body deserved a sacred shrine. While 'Abd al-Rahman's *Batalat Karbala* was an expansive portrayal of an exemplary woman grounded in her earthly roles, *Marqad al-Aqīlah Zaynab* would transform her into a divinely-inspired personality.

Ultimately, the hagiographic components of *Marqad al-Aqīlah Zaynab* and al-Sābiqi's equivalence between Zaynab and the Imams were in the service of glorifying a shrine in her name. The hagiography's intent was primarily to verify and trace the history of the Sayyeda Zaynab shrine itself, arguing that the sacredness of the space had not been properly disseminated or appreciated. While 'Abd al-Rahman had done well in "revealing" Zaynab's true character, she had simply failed to understand the history

[127] Al-Sābiqi, *Marqad al-'Aqīlah Zaynab,* 78.
[128] Al-Sābiqi, *Marqad al-'Aqīlah Zaynab,* 80.

correctly. "There is no fiction or speculation to the view that Zaynab is in Damascus," al-Sābiqi declares.[129] He engages in a systematic refutation of the shrine in Egypt, quoting *rihla* literature, *hadith* narratives, and public histories through the centuries to give evidence that Zaynab was indeed buried at her shrine in Damascus – the shrine that housed the *hawza* he had been inspired to move to. Al-Sābiqi reasons, "How could our most esteemed Lady Zaynab enter Egypt, live there for approximately one year, and die in those lands in the witness of all, and none from among the great historians of that time period noted it?"[130] The absence of historical record, while explained away by 'Abd al-Rahman, was damning for al-Sābiqi. "Those great travelers who traversed the Middle East…and [whose] work documents the famed archeological sites of their ages," Al-Sābiqi argues, travelers who "wrote down everything they observed," all failed to mention the grave of Zaynab bint 'Ali in Egypt.[131] The travelers Ibn Jubayr, Ibn Battuta, and Abu Bakr al-Harawī, the geographer Yāqūt al-Hamawī – all these men mentioned in detail the sacred graves in Egypt and yet none referred to Zaynab bint 'Ali. Al-Sābiqi notes that while there were women from among the descendants of the Imams to travel to Egypt – named in honor after their foremother Zaynab – the Egyptians had failed to accurately distinguish between them and Zaynab bint 'Ali and, in their confusion, these visitations had perpetuated a myth that Zaynab traveled there after Karbala.[132] The Fatimid dynasty had been patrons of a shrine to a Zaynab, as recorded in numerous historical chronicles; al-Sabīqi challenges these records, which the vagueness around the lives of women in early Islam allowed. His hagiography argues instead that caliphs had

[129] Al-Sābiqi, *Marqad al-'Aqīlah Zaynab,* 126.
[130] Al-Sābiqi, *Marqad al-'Aqīlah Zaynab,* 31
[131] Al-Sābiqi, *Marqad al-'Aqīlah Zaynab,* 32.
[132] Al-Sābiqi, *Marqad al-'Aqīlah Zaynab,* 33-45.

visited the shrine of Zaynab bint Yahya bint Zayn al Abidīn, who might have understandably traveled to Egypt during the Fatimid reign.[133] Al-Sābiqi's construction of an alternate history to these famed writers allowed him to put his interpretive weight behind the shrine in Damascus.

Nor was al-Sābiqi's text the only work that referenced the circumstances of Zaynab's death and her shrine in Damascus. Religious scholars and Shi'a faithful alike published a flurry of *ziyārat* literature and hagiographies on the lives of Shi'a figures throughout the 1970s and 1980s, and new works on Zaynab were among them.[134] Sets of prayers were written specifically for *ziyārat* to the Sayyeda Zaynab shrine – a new iteration of a tradition that had begun with the imams themselves. The later imams had shared a particular set of proscribed rituals for *ziyārat,* including prayers for pilgrims to recite as they neared the graves of martyrs to seek permission to enter the sacred space and send blessings on those buried there. Now, published alongside prayers for visitation to Najaf and Karbala were those written for *ziyārat* to Zaynab's grave in Damascus.[135] These prayers framed *ziyārat* to Zaynab's shrine as a continuation of a tradition established by the imams as a mandated part of the Shi'a faith, yet the impetus behind these prayers was a new construct.

The evidence of Zaynab's grave in Syria was numerous, according to Al-Sābiqi; his argument for the predetermination of Zaynab's gravesite in the same manner of Husayn's burial site reveals the growing impulse amongst Shi'as to emphasize the

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[133] Al-Sābiqi, *Marqad al-'Aqīlah Zaynab,* 42.
[134] For examples see Yousuf Lalljee, *Janab-e-Zainab A.S.* (Bombay: P.H. Hamid, 1977); Allamah Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Tabatabā'i, *Shi'a,* ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr (Qum, N.P, 1978) Sayyid Ahmad Fahrī, *Maraqid ahl al-bayt dār sham* (Tehran: Mu'assasat Intishārāt Amir Kablr, 1987).
[135] See Muhammad al-Husayn al-Abid, *Zaynab ukht al-husayn* (Najaf: al-Matba'a al-Haydariyya, 1970), 65-72.

divinity of the shrines, a development away from al-Amīn's opposition to the veneration of the physical sites themselves. In Shi'a hagiography, traditions had developed that Husayn knew the exact spot of his death. Because it was foretold that a great following of people would come to visit his grave and mourn his death, when his caravan arrived at Karbala, Husayn bought the land surrounding the spot. In keeping with the theological concept that developed from this act that the Imams prepared for their death by purchasing land where they were to be buried, Al-Sābiqi argues that Zaynab traveled towards Damascus because her husband owned vast agricultural land there. She did not arrive as a landless refugee to seek asylum; instead, it was simply the fulfillment of her purpose to return to the site where she endured her great hardships.[136] Yet as she approached the city, the pain of memories of her time there overcame her. She paused in a garden in some of those lands on the outskirts of the city, in a village named Rāwiyah. There, "an enemy of the *Ahl al-Bayt*" discovered her and "the last martyr of Karbala was killed" with a blow to her head.[137] Zaynab was buried on that spot, at the site of her greatest trials, so that visitors to her shrine could both visit the sacred geography that she walked through in Damascus and pay their respects to her at her grave. For Shi'as, the grave in Damascus most fully invoked the trauma and persecution of Karbala, conveying the tie between narrative, space, and place.

Almost immediately there would be visitors to the grave, and al-Sābiqi argues that the continued visitation of the site affirmed its sacrality. Like the Prophet promised, the graves of 'Ali's children would never be without pilgrims, no matter how difficult the

[136] Al-Sābiqi, *Marqad al-'Aqīlah Zaynab,* 124.
[137] Al-Sābiqi, *Marqad al-'Aqīlah Zaynab,* 125.

circumstances. That this was the site of Zaynab's grave "was known, visited for centuries, and proven by these venerated pilgrims."[138] This creation of a historical tradition of visitation augmented the growing popularity of the shrine as a pilgrimage site. Those who were undertaking pilgrimage to the Sayyeda Zaynab by the publication of *Marqad al Aqīlah Zaynab* were thus partaking in a constructed tradition, one positioned as an unchanged history. Among the first visitors was Sayyeda Nafīsa bin Ja'far al-Sādiq, daughter of the sixth Imam "who visited the tomb for her foremother in the year 193 Hijri and recorded [this] in works that describe her life."[139] These pious role models create a justification for *ziyārat* at the Sayyeda Zaynab.

The continued visitation of the shrine affirmed its importance, as did the lineage of those who cared for the shrine. Al-Sābiqi takes pains to describe how the original *waqf* for the Zaynab shrine was created, as that history was essential to understanding how esteemed a site this was and the vital current development it was undergoing. Al-Sābiqi notes, "This grave was famous all over the region and thousands used to visit the site from all over the world. In 768 Hijri, in the last days of *Rabi' al-awwal* [1366 AD], a distinguished man from among the learned of Damascus, Syed Husayn bin Musa al-Mūsavi, assigned all the properties he owned surrounding the blessed grave as *waqf*."[140] As a descendant from the seventh Shi'a Imam Mūsa al-Kādhim, the revenues from all the agricultural lands that he owned would go to the shrine as part of this endowment, remaining in perpetuity out of public use and in the name of Zaynab bint 'Ali. Among the witnesses of the *waqf* were seven great judges from Baalbek, Damascus, and Mansura,

[138] Al-Sābiqi, *Marqad al-'Aqīlah Zaynab,* 126.
[139] Al-Sābiqi, *Marqad al-'Aqīlah Zaynab,* 126.
[140] Al-Sābiqi, *Marqad al-'Aqīlah Zaynab,* 120.

representing the five different Islamic legal schools of thought.[141] The *waqf* was registered and confirmed by the presiding *qadi,* or judge, of the Ottoman *Mahakma al-Sharia* in Damascus on the 9th of *Rabbi' al-Awwal,* 1010 Hijri [1601 AD].[142] The *waqf* described in explicit detail the nature of the property and was confirmed by religious scholars of all Islamic schools and granted an Ottoman *firmān* from the local *qadi*. The strength of witnesses in Islam has historically been a powerful verifying mechanism, and the weight of these men's words were proof that Zaynab bint 'Ali was buried in Damascus.[143] Thus, the unbroken chain of visitation, the texts that describe Damascus life, and the testimony of respected witnesses gave al-Sābiqi proof to her authentic grave at the shrine.

The portrayal of Zaynab as a central Shi'a figure, the refutation of the grave in Cairo, and the endorsement of the transnational Shi'a religious network mark *Marqad al-Aqīlah Zaynab* as the culmination of years of hagiographic development. Written with the support of the new *hawza* in Damascus, amidst the Iranian Revolution and the heightened tensions between Iran and Iraq that would lead to war and dramatically curtail access to Shi'a shrines in Iraq, it reveals a critical turning point for both Shi'a representation and political alliances. *Marqad al-Aqīlah Zaynab* was the embodiment of the symbiotic relationship between the reimagined narratives, hagiography, space, pilgrimage, and politics that found its earliest articulations in al-Amīn's ideological

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[141] Al-Sābiqi, *Marqad al-'Aqīlah Zaynab,* 120.
[142] Al-Sābiqi, *Marqad al-'Aqīlah Zaynab,* 121. Much work has been done on Ottoman land-tenure and *waqf* laws, primarily land reform laws, and the implications on new state policies and politics. While these land laws and records are outside of the scope of this dissertation and a complex topic, I argue that the registration in Ottoman *sharia* courts and the continued reauthorization of the *waqf* argues for an on-the-ground reality that privileged continuity over disruption.
[143] Al-Sābiqi, *Marqad al-'Aqīlah Zaynab,* 45.

positions. At a time where shrines in Iraq and Iran were becoming increasingly inaccessible and concerted efforts were promoting the Sayyeda Zaynab shrine, al-Sābiqi constructed a new history in the language of tradition, affirming the view that the Prophet had always deemed the shrines for all 'Ali's children to be sacred places and that "the Prophet promised rewards for those who love his *Ahl al-Bayt*."[144] These new interpretations of Zaynab's life and the benefits attributed to her *ziyārat* bolstered interest in her grave in the post-WWII era and would create a shrine to rival those of the Imams.

According to historian Syed Akbar Hyder, *ziyārat* to Zaynab's shrine took on increasing meaning in the aftermath of the Iranian Revolution, explaining that for pilgrims to her grave, "Husain's [sic] *jihad* was marked partly by swords and arrows; Zaynab's *jihad* was waged through words of eloquence. Husain [sic] made Karbala immortal; Zaynab assured the immortality of Karbala through her sermons in Damascus."[145] This evolving interpretation reveals Zaynab's journey towards infallibility; though she could never be represented as attaining that ultimate status, limited by the circumstances of her birth and exclusion from the chain of the Imamate, she would become the ultimate and ideal role model through which the Imamate itself survived. This unparalleled and unique role would be reinforced by the words of the Iranian radical and the most famous ideologue of the Islamic Revolution, Ali Shari'ati, who chose the shrine of Zaynab as his final burial spot,

> "One has to choose either the blood or the message, to be either Husayn or Zaynab, either to die like him or survive like her…those who died

[144] Al-Sābiqi, *Marqad al-'Aqīlah Zaynab,* 128.
[145] Syed Akbar Hyder, *Reliving Karbala: Martyrdom in South Asian Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 96.

committed a Husayn-like act. Those who survive must perform a Zaynab-like act."[146]

Allama Ali Naqi Naqvi, a Shi'a scholar who earlier in his life referred to Zaynab as a "piteous" lady, would come to describe Zaynab as dignified, strong-willed and determined not to display her grief by the time of his major work on Karbala, *Shaheed-e-Insaniyat*. He remarks, "Zaynab took to her brother's instructions and in the most trying of situations, she did not betray signs of such abject trepidation as to give occasion to her enemies to rejoice at her sufferings," as open expressions of grief in this circumstance was equivalent to questioning God's will for sacrifice. Rather than succumb to fear, Naqvi argues, "it was she who handed over to Husayn the garments he last put on his person on the 10th Moharrum." As a witness to the terrible events of that day, scenes "which would have daunted the bravest of spirits" Naqvi takes pains to point out that at no point did Zaynab despair or reveal the depths of her suffering. Rather, he argues, she "confronted all these moments of surpassing gloom and woe with great self-control and fortitude," an inner control of her emotions that parallels Husayn's ability to sacrifice himself in battle. Rather than weep endlessly or be overcome with grief, Zaynab is instead lauded for her ability to physically prepare her brother for battle.[147] According to Zia Mohyuddin, a prominent Pakistani writer who composed a widely popular poetic narrative tribute to the events of Karbala that would become a staple recitation text of commemoration ceremonies in the early 1980s, Zaynab's behavior in Karbala and its aftermath is seen as the culmination of all the best elements of Shi'ism most revered

[146] Ali Shariati, quoted in "The Women of Karbala." *Reflections Magazine,* March 1984, 12
[147] Ayatollah 'Ali Naqi Naqvi. *Shaheed-e-Insaniyat,* trans. S. Ali Akhtar (London: The Muhammadi Trust of Great Britain and Ireland, 1984), 415-17

figures. Zaynab, he wrote, is "the dearest child of the Prophet's family, highest amongst creations, and the pride of the pious," all attributes that are often used to describe Husayn. For Mohyuddin, Zaynab is "the demonstration of the qualities of the Imamate" and "to sit at [her] feet and weep for her misfortunes in *al-Shām* would open the gates of Heaven."[148] From al-Tabari's brief chronicle, by the end of the 20th century Zaynab would develop into an essential figure in a pantheon of Shi'a martyrs, with her shrine representing new sacred space for pilgrims to express their regard for her and her role in Shi'a history.

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For the pilgrims that would be flocking in the hundreds of thousands to the growing Sayyeda Zaynab shrine, which just decades before was not more than a small structure in a village outside Damascus, *ziyārat* to her shrine was framed as an assertive articulation of sectarian and narrative representations of Zaynab. The process to define Zaynab into one of the central figures in Shi'a history would ultimately be tied to authenticating and sacralizing her shrine in Damascus. The link between narrative, space, and practice would grow through the early decades and meet its apex in 1979, with the Iranian Revolution transforming the nature of being Shi'a in the modern world. The politics of expansion would open new interpretations, including from the state, as hagiography encountered the facts on the ground.

[148] Zia Mohyuddin, "*Mukammal Ziyarat.*" Recorded in *Qabr Abu Fadhl 'Abbas – Dastaweezi wa Ruhani Tahqeeq – Safar Karbala, Safar Najaf, Safar Mashhad, Shaam,* 1989.

Chapter Two
Ruqayyah bint ‘Ali and Tales of an Extraordinary Life

While representations of Zaynab underwent a dramatic, even sectarian, evolution in the course of the 20th century as rhetoric over the authenticity and importance of her shrine grew, that there was a ‘historical Zaynab’ who was present at Karbala remained without doubt. The consequences of who she was, what she meant, and where she was buried, however, became the realm of interpretation among scholars, theologians, and political figures alike. The story of Ruqayyah, Zaynab’s sister, would take a different path. How one of ‘Ali’s daughters would have ended up buried in a small sanctuary named Bibi Pak Daman in Lahore has been the subject of various competing narratives, all of which reveal the complex religious, financial, and jurisprudential interests at stake in this shrine after Pakistan’s independence. As the interest and importance of *ziyārat* to Shi’a shrines grew and evolving interpretations emerged over the role of women in political and religious engagement, new hagiographies were constructed around the shrine and Ruqayyah that would reveal the dual impulse to link Lahore to Medina, Najaf, Karbala – all the established holiest sites of Shi’ism – while still grounding Ruqayyah in the national context. Her story and the shrine of Bibi Pak Daman provided a way to order the past in a nation still coming to terms with the trauma of Partition and its identity as a Muslim secular state.

Unlike Zaynab, who immediately figured in political and poetic accounts of Karbala from the 7th century onward, the historical figure of Ruqayyah has been more elusive – and thus more malleable. Ruqayyah’s childhood and personal characteristics would be constructed almost as a direct mirror to interpretations of Zaynab; where she

would be individualized was solely in the context of what she would endure at and after Karbala. And while hagiographies of Zaynab sought to ground themselves in historical records and *hadith* traditions, even while offering new interpretations as her shrine grew, Ruqayyah's life and her hagiographies embodied miraculous revelations and parables. While the name Ruqayyah does appear in early Shi'a history to identify numerous women, like Zaynab it was a common name in 'Ali's family. Hagiographies claim that this Ruqayyah was 'Ali's daughter from his second wife, Umm al-Banīn. She was also the sister of Abbas ibn 'Ali, Husayn's closest advisor and standard-bearer at Karbala, and was married to Muslim bin Aqīl, Husayn's cousin and emissary. Muslim and his two sons were killed in Kufa raising support for Husayn before the caravan left for Karbala and are considered the first martyrs of Karbala. For centuries, despite her links to these revered figures, few accounts of Karbala mentioned Ruqayyah's presence specifically, nor relate any particular narratives to her time in the camps or as a prisoner in Damascus.

Yet by 1994, in a hagiography written by a Sunni researcher and endorsed by the Department of Auqaf in Pakistan, the government agency that had taken over administration of Bibi Pak Daman in 1967, Ruqayyah's destiny had become of critical importance to the *Ahl al-Bayt*. Her purpose was revealed at the same time 'Ali gave his dying instructions to Hassan, Husayn, and Zaynab. To his sons he entrusted the Imamate and foretold of the disloyalties they would both face. He reminded Zaynab that it would be her mission to carry on the true message of Islam after the death of all the men present at Karbala. Then, the author Masood Hashmi writes,

> One by one, Ali gave his daughters instructions for the proselytizing of Islam and described the cultures and geographic locations of various lands to which they must go…

> To Sayyeda Ruqayyah, he claimed, "Daughter, your husband and sons will be martyred in Karbala, but you will have to take your daughters and Fatima's progeny to Sindh and Hind. There, you are responsible for the preaching of the religion of Mustafa [the Prophet Muhammad], for in that part of the world is the opportunity to spread Islam the greatest. I see that in Sindh and Hind the people will become Muslims by your hands, and then this will be the land that will be suitable for the people of Banu Fatima to live in, for there will be the greatest number of those who love the family of the Prophet."[149]

The moment of Ali's will is a critical moment for Shi'ism; according to traditions, Ali's words created the first imagined map of Islam, constructing a sacred geography that would then come to fruition as his descendants spread to preach the faith. The divine mandates that he gave to Hassan, Husayn, and Zaynab and the belief that the events of Karbala were preordained became part of the theology of Karbala. Zaynab was destined to survive and travel to Damascus to spread the true Islam. Yet this hagiography extends this map and includes this same role for Ruqayyah, mirroring the weighty mission that was given to Zaynab. That 'Ali would impart to one of his daughters the knowledge that she would survive the events of Karbala and was destined to preach in the subcontinent served to elevate the status of Islam in the region. Like Karbala itself, Ruqayyah's presence and shrine in Pakistan was foretold, irrevocably tied to the predetermination of Karbala and the manifestation of God's divine will. Yet this narrative also reveals a remarkable specificity and importance attributed to a woman whose life remained fairly ambiguous through centuries after Karbala. How this became the nationally endorsed hagiography of Ruqayyah's life and the challenges that emerged to this interpretation reveal the interpretive and political stakes at this shrine. Bibi Pak Daman would be a site onto which tensions over meaning-making, sectarian relations, and Islam in Pakistan

[149] Hashmi, *Makhdooma Bibi Ruqayyah,* 185-86.

would be mapped, and the hagiographies that emerged of Ruqayyah's life and death would reflect the shrine's increasing prominence.

Ruqayyah bint 'Ali at the End of the British Raj

In 1864, Ruqayyah's story would find its way into popular accounts of important religious sites of the subcontinent with the publication of *Tahqiqāt-e-Chishti,* written by the Sufi spiritual leader Maulvi Nur Ahmad Chishti. The author was a follower and descendant of the famed Sufi saint Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti, who established the Chishti order in Lahore in the 12th century.[150] *Tahqiqāt-e-Chishti* was written as an account of the religious and archaeological monuments in Lahore and its surrounding areas that had notable ties to the Chishti order, with brief narratives and spiritual guidance regarding each shrine. Nur Ahmad Chishti notes that the work was aimed to shed light on the affairs of holy men who made a noticeable impact on the daily lives of Muslims, for the courts of the sultans had long dictated the recorded history of the subcontinent.[151] The timing of the work was notable, published shortly after the Indian Rebellion of 1857 and undoubtedly influenced by the rise in communalism and reactions against the installation of direct colonial rule by the British Raj. *Tahqiqāt-e-Chishti* was arguably one of the more popular early examples of a modern 'history from below' in the subcontinent, a chronicle of the influence that holy men and Sufi leaders had on the affairs of the powerful.

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[150] For more on the Chishti order, see Carl W. Ernst and Bruce Lawrence, *Sufi Martyrs of Love: The Chishti Order in South Asia and Beyond* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002). It is considered one of the four Sufi branches, or *tarīqas,* responsible for establishing and integrating Islam into the subcontinent.

[151] Nur Ahmad Chishti, *Tahqiqāt-e-Chishti* (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications, 1965), 10.

Chishti claims that Lahore was rich in holy shrines and graves of hundreds of learned men, as the city was said to have been the destination of a caravan headed by Ruqayyah bint ‘Ali that arrived in the 7th century. Ruqayyah had brought along 704 Qurānic scholars as she took refuge in Lahore after the events of Karbala; when she was threatened by political persecution, she dispersed her followers, Chishti narrates, and “these men continued to guide their students in the ways of the Qurān and would become the great *pīrs* (Sufi masters) that would spread the message among their followers. Their graves number in the hundreds around the city.”[152] Through Ruqayyah, Chishti notes, the *pīrs* who helped spread Islam in the subcontinent were directly linked to ‘Ali, who is a central figure in Sufi traditions. Notably, Chishti had little to say of Ruqayyah herself or of her journey to Lahore, nor did he cite any extensive historical or religious sources in detailing the caravan she traveled with. Instead, he acknowledges that this was the story “that was known to those that have studied the history of Islam in the city.”[153] Her presence can be traced in the scholars she left behind, who created a direct link from local *pirs* to ‘Ali, venerated by many as the father of Sufism. Ruqayyah was merely a vessel, someone whose existence transported Islam to the heart of the subcontinent and to the male Sufi saints of prominent orders.

The notion that Ruqayyah bint ‘Ali’s presence affirmed Islam’s historic influence in the subcontinent would find its way into anti-colonial and anti-Hindu narratives in the early 20th century. In his pamphlet *Kitāb Yaad-e-Raftagāneh Nau*, written about the Muslim saints and shrines of Lahore and published in 1910, the Kashmiri activist

[152] Chishti, *Tahqiqāt-e-Chishti*, 200.
[153] Chishti, *Tahqiqāt-e-Chishti,* 201.

Muhammad al-Dīn Fawq would elaborate on Ruqayyah's arrival in the subcontinent and the conditions she encountered. In this narrative, Ruqayyah validated the centrality of Islam to local heritage and the indelible tradition of Muslim practice in the subcontinent. Ruqayyah had been present through Husayn's arrival at Karbala, Fawq narrates, but on the night before *Ashura* she left Husayn's camp at his command, headed towards the subcontinent with a host of scholars accompanying her. The local Hindu Raja in Lahore feared her arrival, for his subjects had grown tired of the oppression they had suffered and would be susceptible to her words. Immediately upon hearing whom Ruqayyah was and the great lineage from which she descended, the raja's subjects began to convert towards Islam and their idol and fire temples fell into ruin.[154] The raja's own son "was moved by the strength of Ruqayyah's faith and would at once recite the *kalimah"* and convert to Islam.[155] By her death, she had converted thousands *en masse* away from the unjust Hindu rulers and had firmly established Islam in Lahore as early as the 7th century.

The importance of Ruqayyah's shrine in Lahore and the story of conversion away from Hinduism provide an insight into the political and ideological concerns of Muhammad al-Dīn Fawq's time. Since 1845, the majority Muslim province of Kashmir had been ruled by Hindu Dogra dynasty, installed with the backing of the British colonial regime. With severe repression on publications and on public speech rampant, especially targeting Muslim activists, a large population of Kashmiris had fled to Lahore at the turn of the 20th century. Muhammad al-Dīn Fawq in particular was a vociferous opponent of Hindu rule, a prolific writer, and a close associate of Allama Muhammad Iqbal, widely

[154] Muhammad al-Din Fawq, *Kitāb Yaad-e-Raftagāneh Nau* (1910), 36.
[155] Fawq, *Kitab Yaad-e-Raftagāneh Nau* (1910), 36. In Urdu, the word *kalimah* refers to the *shahada*, the testimonial in belief in the oneness of God and Muhammad as his messenger, which marks the conversion to Islam.

regarded as the ideological father of the Pakistan Movement. In Lahore, Muhammad al-Dīn Fawq established numerous publications, including the *Akhbār-e-Kashmiri Lahore*, in which he wrote extensively on the social and political issues plaguing Kashmir under the Dogras. Of particular concern to Muhammad al-Dīn Fawq was the deliberate disregard their Hindu overlords had for the indigenous Muslim archeological heritage of Kashmir. The Dogras were only concerned with Hindu sites of worship, he accused; "if the religious places of 95 per cent of the inhabitants of the State" could not be given appropriate attention, he argued, "they should at least be restored to the Muhammadans."[156] Thus, the notion of an indigenous Islamic heritage, one traced centuries back to the daughter of 'Ali himself, lent a powerful legend to anti-colonial and anti-Hindu rhetoric. In Muhammad al-Dīn Fawq's eyes, these Muslim sites had not been given their proper respect and care, much as the local Hindu raja in Ruqayyah's time had oppressed his subjects and tried to prevent their conversion and practices. As the recently established All-India Muslim League grew in strength, Muslim activists had begun to demand greater religious and political rights and autonomy under the British Raj. The archeological and political significance of Muslim shrines spoke to the indelible cultural heritage of Islam in the subcontinent and, consequently, their rights to equal representation.[157] In this hagiography, written amidst growing discontent with the

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[156] Muhammad al-Dīn Fawq, as quoted in Mridu Rai, *Hindu Rulers, Muslim Subjects: Islam, Rights, and the History of Kashmir* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 215.

[157] Notably, however, the arguments made in support of Muslim rights, primarily those made by the All-India Muslim League (established in 1906), were initially not couched in religious or separatist language but rather in appeals to Muslim cultural heritage on the subcontinent. The dominance of the Unionist Party in Punjab and their close ties with the British Raj illustrates the conflicting views that existed on defining political identities based on religion. Yet the communal sentiments and fear of Hindu domination would eventually make the triumph of the Muslim League possible – and indeed, evolve the Muslim League into supporting an independent

communal situation, Ruqayyah bint 'Ali's presence and the message of Islam was powerful enough to convert the raja's own son, which spoke to Ruqayyah's personal piety and, more critically, to the righteousness of Islam in the face of Hindu opposition. At the turn of the century, the contours of Ruqayyah's story were becoming defined, tied to an emerging narrative about the significance of Islamic cultural heritage in the pre-independence Indian subcontinent.

Still, despite Fawq's pamphlet, circulated primarily in Lahore, Ruqayyah's story remained largely in the realm of oral traditions and local devotional practice. The written references to her shrine were primarily in the context of Sufi history and heritage in Lahore, especially in debates over Islam in the subcontinent vis-à-vis Hindu rulers and the British Raj, with the focus on Ruqayyah's male scholarly companions and their knowledge of the Qurān. The Bibi Pak Daman shrine would find a brief mention in John Subhan's 1938 work *Sufism, its Saints and Shrines*, a popular work written by a Sufi convert to Christianity. Subhan was raised in a Muslim home, and his family had close and loyal ties to the Mughal regime, until the British Raj's crackdown after 1857 made their political situation more precarious. Subhan converted to Christianity at the age of 11 and received his education primarily in English. Subhan wrote numerous observances on religious life in India, and his unique background made his work popular amongst colonial elite and readers outside of India. He chronicles Bibi Pak Daman as "a popular site for the *Mussalman* in Lahore" and notes that locals believe Ruqayyah was the wife of

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Pakistan, a previously unthinkable proposition. For more see David Gilmartin, *Empire and Islam: Punjab and the Making of Pakistan* (London: I.B Tauris, 1989).

Muslim bin Aqīl, fleeing the events of Karbala.[158] Subhan recounts a similar tale of conversion, though notably places the emphasis on a conversion from idol-worship to monotheism, rather than Islam in particular. He specifically names the five daughters buried along with Ruqayyah - Bibi Hur, Bibi Nur, Bibi Gawhar, Bibi Taj, and Bibi Shahbaz. These names are Persian in origin, and for those who refuse Ruqayyah's existence and the many skeptics of this narrative, Subhan acknowledges, this fact undermines the claim that these women could have been members of 'Ali ibn Abu Talib's family. Subhan rationalizes, however, that this fact "need not surprise us, because after the Muslim conquest of Persia most of the ladies belonging to the Persian royal family were given in marriage to 'Ali's sons and relatives."[159] Thus, the Persianization of names in 'Ali's family was a reasonable outcome. This account and Subhan's own injections make clear that while devotees to Bibi Pak Daman had a particular narrative in mind, one that appeared to be the popular interpretation of the shrine, there did exist challenges on the ground to the legend that Ruqayyah might have arrived in Lahore along with her daughters. Subhan notes, however, that the proof of Ruqayyah's presence also existed historically, with the Mughal emperor Akbar endowing as *waqf* the property of the shrine. The hagiography remained the most popular account of Bibi Pak Daman, with the discipline of history turning its attention to exploring political and religious differences between Muslims and Hindus in the context of independence. While Subhan dismisses the objections to Ruqayyah's grave, later hagiographies would tackle these

[158] John Subhan. *Sufism, its Saints and Shrines: An Introduction to the Study of Sufism with Special Reference to India* (Lucknow: The Lucknow Publishing House, 1938), 120.
[159] Subhan, *Sufism, its Saints and Shrines,* 120. Subhan's work is the first written reference to name the graves and is subsequently quoted in all later hagiographies.

conflicting narratives head-on, displaying a clear commitment to the narrative that Bibi Pak Daman was connected to Ruqayyah bint ‘Ali.

The Shi’a Hagiography

The most robust and detailed hagiography of Ruqayyah bint ‘Ali would be published in 1979, though it was the result of two decades of research and efforts undertaken by a local scholar who lived near the shrine of Bibi Pak Daman. The author, Maulvi Muhammad Bakhsh Shah Qureshi, had been a self-professed Deobandi Sunni Muslim, a follower of the rigidly orthodox Islamic ideology introduced to the subcontinent in the mid-19th century; in the aftermath of Pakistani independence in 1947, Deobandi ideology had formed the basis of radical militant Islamic parties, including many explicitly aimed at targeting the spread of Shi’a Islam in Pakistan.[160] Qureshi, however, was visited by Ruqayyah in a dream and inspired to convert to Shi’a Islam, fostering a deep devotion to Ruqayyah bint ‘Ali and her family. He writes in the introduction to his *Tarikh-e-Bibian Pak Daman (SA)* that he began visiting Ruqayyah’s shrine in 1960, praying at the holy site up to twice a day. At the time, however, “there were no solid written proofs or evidence on who was buried at the shrine. Though the majority of believers knew this was the daughter of ‘Ali, some misguided visitors

[160] The Deobani School developed as an Islamic response to British colonialism, centered at an Islamic seminary known as Dār ul-Uloom Deoband. Scholars from the school initially opposed the Pakistan movement on ideological grounds. The political manifestations of the Deobandi School in post-independence Pakistan would take the shape of extremist parties, including the *Jamiat Ulema-e-Islami,* the banned *Sipah-e-Sahaba* that targets Shi’as exclusively and its offshoot, *Lashkar-e-Jhangvi*,and most recently the Pakistani Taliban. For more on Deobandi ideology, see Ayesha Jalal, *Partisans of Allah: Jihad in South Asia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010) and Barbara Metcalf, *Islamic Contestations: Essays on Muslims in India and Pakistan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

believed she was the daughter of the Sufi saint Syed Ahmad Tokhta."[161] Qureshi's deep convictions and the miraculous revelations he received made him certain that it was indeed Ruqayyah bint 'Ali's grave at Bibi Pak Daman. During his visits to the shrine, he would repeatedly get into arguments with those who challenged this narrative; one day he found himself overwhelmed by those who doubted and began to weep, beseeching Ruqayyah for a sign, to reveal "the truth of her presence," as in his faith "he could no longer bear the denials."[162] The next day, from unexpected sources, he was sent a message to visit a preacher named Aashiq Hussain, a scholar who had collected proofs and documents on Bibi Pak Daman and set him on the decades-long path to write this hagiography. Along with Ruqayyah's own narrative, for Qureshi, the story behind the book too was "no less than a miracle," with even his failing eyesight cured along the way as further evidence of her miraculous presence.[163]

Written from 1960 to 1979, *Tarikh-e-Bibian Pak Daman* is a vast chronicle on the history of the *Ahl al-Bayt*, the events of Karbala, Islam in South Asia, and Ruqayyah's own narrative; as the most comprehensive work written on Ruqayyah, it would become the main source from which later hagiographies would draw. In addition to the years of research he had already undertaken on the shrine, Qureshi was appointed as the only Shi'a member of Bibi Pak Daman's Religious Affairs Committee (RPC) in 1968, his commitment fully to the narrative that Ruqayyah bint 'Ali was buried at Bibi Pak Daman.[164] Through 1967 and 1968, in the aftermath of the government takeover of the shrine of Bibi Pak Daman, Qureshi had published a series of columns in two Lahore

[161] Maulvi Muhammad Bakhsh Shah Qureshi, *Tarikh Bibian Pak Daman (SA),* (Lahore, 1979), 2.
[162] Qureshi, *Tarikh Bibian Pak Daman,* 3.
[163] Qureshi, *Tarikh Bibian Pak Daman,* 4.
[164] "Maulana Muhammad Bakhsh Qureshi ki nāmzadgi," *Al-Assad*, August 5, 1968.

newspapers that were aimed at spreading the true story of Ruqayyah and Bibi Pak Daman. The content from the articles would form the basis of the book, though Qureshi expanded on them significantly to trace the histories of the shrine's caretakers, different narratives about Karbala, and the political considerations involved in the shrine. Qureshi's purpose in writing the book is clear – to bring to Ruqayyah's life and shrine the respect and understanding deserved for the daughter of 'Ali, to disprove any rival narratives that existed and expose why they had been created, and to make sure the new administration of the shrine itself matched the narrative and religious importance of the site. Qureshi believed that if these goals could be accomplished, "the shrine and bazaar of Bibi Pak Daman would become like Pakistan's Karbala."[165] Like Zaynab, his representations of Ruqayyah and her narrative as she traveled to Lahore would reflect the particular ideological and political currents at the shrine as pilgrimage to Bibi Pak Daman expanded. It would draw on transnational tropes and parables that would resonate in a Shi'a context, creating a miraculous and legendary persona for Ruqayyah, one equal to the most revered Shi'a figures. Yet the narrative was also an unabashedly national one, the first comprehensive hagiography written in post-independence Pakistan and one that shows the extent to which national narratives had already become a powerful construct for understanding contentious spaces. It would be published at a critical time – the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan would turn Pakistan into an ally of Taliban fighters, General Zia ul-Haq's martial law and Islamization policies had taken effect, igniting sectarian reactions across the country, and the Iranian Revolution would have a deep impact in

[165] Qureshi, *Tarikh Bibian Pak Daman,* 3.

Pakistan. In this context, *Tarikh-e-Bibian Pak Daman* would bring significant attention to Bibi Pak Daman, igniting new contestations over the space and the meaning of *ziyārat*.

For Qureshi, Ruqayyah's real journey began in Husayn's camp on the plains of Karbala. In the hagiography, her early life is largely portrayed as a reflection of the well-known aspects of the history of *Ahl al-Bayt* and their persecution, rather than through the exploration of individual characteristics. She was the daughter of 'Ali's second wife, a woman named *Umm al-Banīn*, who it was said he married because he knew she would bear him sons who would fight bravely with Husayn at Karbala. Ruqayyah was the sister of Abbas, Husayn's standard-bearer, though little was known about their relationship at a young age, unlike the close bond that Zaynab had with her brothers in Shi'a hagiography. Ruqayyah's personality was said to have mirrored Zaynab's, a fact more likely reflecting a lack of historical or theological traditions that could be referenced in detail about Ruqayyah. Indeed, what was described as important in Ruqayyah's life before Karbala was simply her connection to the Prophet and 'Ali's family. It was in Karbala, however, that her true purpose and story would emerge, a narrative that would be tied to the importance of Pakistan as a country of true faith and Islamic greatness. On the night before *Ashura*, Husayn summoned Ruqayyah and reminded her it was time for her to leave their camps and head towards her preordained fate. According to Qureshi, "Husayn instructed her, 'the will of 'Ali is that you and your female companions must find safe haven in a faraway land.' When Ruqayyah further questioned why she must leave him, Husayn replied that she must go to Hindustan. 'Your presence there will eventually give

birth to a great Islamic nation,' he promised."[166] According to Qureshi, the importance of spreading Islam in the subcontinent in the way that 'Ali had prophesized and their obedience to his authority overcame all their personal emotions. He writes, "Ruqayyah wept and asked Husayn how she would show her face to Fatima on the Day of Judgment after abandoning her beloved son in Karbala….The pain of a sister leaving her beloved brother in such wretched conditions will never be matched."[167] Thus, in Qureshi's legend, Ruqayyah did experience and endure suffering at Karbala and was sanctified by these hardships, in the same manner as those whose tales had resonated for centuries. After sacrificing her husband and two sons, enduring the days without food and water, her final trial was to leave behind her brother, knowing what was to come for them. Nevertheless, just as each event at Karbala transpired as they were ordained, 704 men were dispatched with Ruqayyah, "so that they could bear witness to the events of Karbala throughout the lands and the stories of what happened could never be denied."[168] Interestingly, the motif of Ruqayyah as the critical witness and messenger mirrors the most prominent emerging depiction of Zaynab – mirrored in Shari'ati's call for the importance of the message in Islamic history and revolution. Though she would not be present during the events of *Ashura* and as a prisoner, she bore the same responsibility as Zaynab. Her grief at leaving Husayn was the same as Zaynab's, yet she had to accept her role as a survivor who used the power of words, just as Zaynab would. The martyrs of Karbala were promised that they would be mourned by a great many, even though they were abandoned on *Ashura*; Ruqayyah was sent into a fearful unknown with the assurance that from her travel would

[166] Qureshi, *Tarikh Bibian Pak Daman,* 154.
[167] Qureshi, *Tarikh Bibian Pak Daman,* 157.
[168] Qureshi, *Tarikh Bibian Pak Daman,* 155.

emerge a great Islamic nation – Pakistan – that would honor her. In this hagiography, the divine importance of Pakistan and its Muslims was interwoven into the events of Karbala. Lahore and Karbala were linked on a transnational map of sacred geography, at a time when transnational religious appeals were reaching their peak.

According to Qureshi, after much wandering and trials, Ruqayyah and her companions reached Hindu-ruled Lahore, setting in motion a miraculous chain of events. The masses immediately began to convert to Islam when they encountered Ruqayyah's piety and her heart-wrenching tales of what they had endured in Karbala. "The news spread of her blessings and miracles…at the same time, the fire that had continuously burned in the Raja's court went out, and its worshippers were astounded."[169] The Hindu raja was disturbed by this turn of events and – much like Yazīd had done – summoned these visitors to his court. Ruqayyah and her ladies, however, demurred out of fear, grief, and their own piety. In order to forcibly bring Ruqayyah in, the Raja dispatched his son, Bakr Mai Sahai, to their camp. When he reached the hill, he announced the Raja's orders in a loud voice, knowing that these foreigners would not be able to comprehend his words. To his shock, one woman, who appeared to be their leader, stepped forward and responded in his local tongue that they were the descendants of the Prophet of Islam, come to seek asylum after the trials of Karbala. Though Ruqayyah's words had a great impact upon him, the prince was forced by duty to bring them in, either willing or through force. In Ruqayyah's distress and anger, she raised her head from her veil to glance at him, "the force of which he could not bear and fainted."[170] When he awoke, he

[169] Qureshi, *Tarikh Bibian Pak Daman,* 145.
[170] Qureshi, *Tarikh Bibian Pak Daman,* 145.

renounced idol worshipping and converted immediately to Islam, and was given the name Abdullah by Ruqayyah. As a result, for some time Ruqayyah and her family were able to live in peace and preach the message of Islam to her followers under the protection of the prince and the favor he commanded from the reluctant Raja. The Ruqayyah story is unique in its exploration of Hindu/Muslim tensions, as her ties to the center of Islam made the contrast more distinct.

Indeed, continued harassment by the Hindus made their lives unbearable. Ruqayyah gathered the 704 Qurānic scholars that had traveled under her command from Karbala and ordered 700 of them to disperse to continue her preaching.[171] Thus, she ensured that her teachings of the true Islam of 'Ali would continue around the region, in accordance with her father's wishes, as these scholars would become venerated *pīrs* amongst their own followers. Then, she gathered the four close male companions and the women of her family and "prayed that the earth might shield them from the sight of these unbelievers, and in answer to their prayer, the earth opened her mouth and mercifully swallowed them!"[172] Upon witnessing this wondrous sight, the convert prince vowed to protect this sacred ground, building seven tombs over the spot and becoming the first *mujawwar* (guardian) of the shrine. Before the government's takeover of the shrine in 1967, and even in the aftermath of federal administration when *Tarikh-e-Bibian Pak Daman* was published, the caretakers of the shrine claimed to be descendants of this prince, gaining authority and influence from appropriating the concept of hereditary succession that marks other Sufi shrines in Pakistan.

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[171] This reference comes up repeatedly in numerous hagiographies, including Fawq, Subhan, Qureshi. See also Mohammad Latif Malik, *Aulia-e-Lahore* (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publishers, 1932), 111.
[172] Qureshi, *Tarikh Bibian Pak Daman,* 189.

This moment that Ruqayyah vanished is perhaps the most critical in Ruqayyah's hagiographies, as her disappearance, then, is not death, as Qureshi notes that these women are "still alive, just out of our sight."[173] As such, her ability to intercede on behalf of her devotees was determined both by her lineage through 'Ali and her in-between state: neither living nor dead, she transcended both realms. She thus carries a tremendous power for devotees, further transforming the shrine into a living space. The shrine was thus for Shi'as a place of remembrance and commemoration, where a small remnant piece of cloth of their tents was said to be visible after the ground swallowed the women, rather than housing the physical remains of Ruqayyah and her companions. Because Ruqayyah had not died, the Raja's son built a boundary wall around the area to continue to respect her modesty, so that no men could easily access the site where Ruqayyah and her companions had disappeared.

With time, Qureshi notes, it was likely forgotten by the vast majority of devotees that these were not graves, though the pleas for intercession continued unabated. This attribute of transcending death was in direct contrast to the lives of the Sufi saints that have shaped Islam in South Asia; while believers had affirmed the saints' ability to intercede on their behalf, there were no claims about their immortality in other hagiographies. In particular, with the government's nationalization of *waqf* properties in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the Auqaf Department would publish officially sanctioned biographies of saints and *pīrs* that simply characterized them as figures that embodied exemplary Muslim behavior, not as divine figures who could perform miracles. The coup of Zia ul-Haq on July 5th 1977 and the tremendous upheaval that followed transformed

[173] Qureshi, *Tarikh Bibian Pak Daman,* 200.

the nature of the state. The new regime acted immediately and aggressively to implement a state-sponsored religious program of Islamization, one influenced by conservative Islamic parties descended from the Deobandi School. Prominent shrines did not remain unaffected, especially as Auqaf Department sought to reframe saints in the context of their pious devotion to the main tenets of Islam. A supplement to the *Pakistan Times*, dated April 27, 1979, illustrated this shifting focus. In an article entitled, "Who was Hazrat Shahdaula," the author details not the miracles the saint was responsible for or that devotees at his shrine experienced, but rather that this particular saint

> had a boundless urge for helping the poor and the needy. He swept the streets of the town he lived in himself, carried the cows and buffalows [sic] of the town people, and during winter, carried firewood to the houses of the poor and the needy on his own back.[174]

The emphasis on pious acts versus miraculous divinity should be viewed through the lens of Zia's Islamic Ordinances– a legal and social framework legislating a normative 'state' Islam that would fan the flames of sectarian cleavages. In line with the resistance to an Islam that emphasized a spiritual or other-worldly dimension, in Auqaf documents, the graves at Bibi Pak Daman were said to hold the physical remains of the six women. References to the belief that they disappeared and are living in occultation are excluded, as this doctrine fell outside the scope of 'accepted' state orthodoxy.[175] Instead, it was the good deeds of

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[174] Karim Khan Taunsvi, "Who was Hazrat Shahdaula," *The Pakistan Times*, April 29, 1979.
[175] The writings and political pressures of the Jamaat-e-Islami, a group founded by Abul Ala Maududi in 1941, inspired much of Zia ul-Haq's Islamization program. Maududi's *Salafi* conservative philosophies gained him a huge following in Pakistan and would heavily influence the state's interpretation of *Shari'at*. Shi'a concepts of *ghaybat* were based in part on the concept of the Mehdi, or Messiah, present in the Qurān. According to Maududi, however, this Mehdi would not be a figure returned from occultation. He would not proclaim himself as such. "I do not find any room in his work for supernatural acts, divine inspirations and ascetic and spiritual

Ruqayyah's life and the importance of her presence in what would become Pakistan that was emphasized. Shi'a hagiographies, however, would construct Ruqayyah's life as the embodiment of miraculous divine favor, a rebuttal to the rising militancy of sectarian Sunni theology.

The claim that these women were simply taken away due to the threat on their lives mirrors one of the central tenets of the Shi'a faith: the occultation (*ghaybat*) of the last Shi'a Imam, who was hidden by God after the martyrdom of all the Imams before him, to ensure that the line of succession from 'Ali would continue till the Day of Judgment. As such, it is not surprising that the concept of the *ghaybat*, which remains a source of great tension between Sunni and Shi'a theology, would be a feature unique to Shi'a hagiographies.[176] Yet attributing such a sacred phenomenon to Ruqayyah is

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exercises," he wrote. This interpretation of the Mehdi would be in direct contrast to Shi'a theology. See Abul Ala Maududi, "al-Imam ul-Mehdi," in *A Short History of the Revivalist Movement in Islam,* 1st ed. (Delhi: Markaza Maktaba Islami, 1973), 40-41.

[176] The occultation of the last Shi'a Imam and the belief in his messianic return remains perhaps the most critical – and controversial – component of Twelver Shi'a theology and was developed as a response to the crisis of the Imamate after the murder of the 11th Imam, Hassan al-Askari. According to Shi'a theology, after the death of Muhammad, the last Prophet, there would always remain an Imam of the age to guide and advise the faithful until the end of time. Yet none of the Imams had died a natural death, all murdered by various political or religious authorities. After the death of Hassan al-Askari in 873 AD, his son, Muhammad al-Mahdi, was hidden from Abbasid authorities, though he appointed and still communicated through four deputies. This period was known as the *Ghaybat al-Sughra*, or Minor Occultation. In 941 AD, the fourth deputy died, ushering the period known as the *Ghaybat al-Kubra*, or Great Occultation, in which the Imam would be removed from all sight and communication, alive and watchful but separate from human affairs; the *Ghaybat al-Kubra* would last until the end of the days and the Mahdi's return to usher in the Day of Judgment. Drawing from rival religious and chiliastic movements that had developed before the *ghaybat*, contemporary Shi'a scholars such as Ibn Babuya al-Qummi, Ya'qubal al-Kulayni, and later Shaykh al-Mufíd developed a theology of occultation. For more on the development and institutionalization of the doctrine of occultation, and formative influence of the Mu'tazalite rational tradition, see Said Amir Arjomand, "The Consolation of Theology: Absence of the Imam and Transition from Chiliasm to Law and Shi'ism," *The Journal of Religion*, Vol. 76, No. 4 (Oct. 1996), 548-571, and "The Crisis of the Imamate and the Institution of Occultation in Twelver Shi'ism: A Sociohistorical Perspective," in *International Journal of Middle East Studies,* vol. 28, No. 4 (Nov. 1996), 491-515. The question of religious and political

striking; the 12th Shi'a Imam, or the Mahdi, is the holiest of figures, one whose very existence has defined and continued a distinct Shi'a identity. The most revered figures in Shi'ism achieved martyrdom, sacrificing their lives willingly in the name of God at the Prophet's family; yet the focus on Ruqayyah's *ghaybat* is implicitly equated with the Mahdi and sends a different message – when surrounded by non-believers in a foreign land, pursued by the enemies of 'Ali and his family, she was saved to illustrate both God's omnipotence and the exalted status of the Prophet's family. In Qureshi's hagiography, of all those that suffered before her and in her family, only Ruqayyah was shielded by God.

The allusions to *ghaybat* in *Tarikh-e-Bibian Pak Daman* appear throughout to construct a uniquely divine portrayal of Ruqayyah. Qureshi notes another miracle accepted by Shi'a hagiographies: the severed and impaled head of Husayn was said to have recited Qurānic verses along the way from Karbala to Damascus. Husayn was repeating the Qurānic chapter *Al-Kahf*, which tells the story of a small group of believers who faced persecution in their time. With the guidance of God, they fled to a cave and went to sleep; when they awoke 309 years later, the regimes of their oppressors had passed and the population had become monotheistic. Husayn's recitation of this verse

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authority in Shi'ism in the absence of the Twelfth Imam, however, remained an evolving realm of interpretation and adaption, and Ayatollah "Imam" Ruhollah Khomeini's series of lectures on the notion of the *Vilayat-e-Faqīh,* or the guardianship of the jurist in the absence of the Mahdi, would prompt scholarly and religious debates on Shi'ism's historic relationship to authority and power. Said Amir Arjomand, for example, argues that since the overthrow of the Abbasid caliphate, Shi'a theologians recognized that a temporal ruler could be recognized as a legitimate, conditional on his execution of justice and without claims to the religious authority that remained solely in the hands of the Twelfth Imam. Hamid Algar, however, argues there existed an inherent incompatibility between Shi'a doctrine and political authority. The concept of *ghaybat* would also provide powerful in literary and political rhetoric. In particular, the concept was used to powerful effect in the discussion of the disappearance of Musa al-Sadr, the charismatic Shi'a activist who mysteriously disappeared in a trip to Libya in 1978. See Fouad Ajami, *The Vanished Imam*.

illustrated that God had infinite power to protect even the smallest group of believers, if he so chose, but in some cases sacrifice was in order. Qureshi compares Ruqayyah's story in detailed to the parable of The Cave. He notes that the *ghaybat* remains an aspect of Ruqayyah's life that raised the most skepticism, but argues, "Because of ignorance on the divine will of Allah, the Qurānic has promised that until the end of time, people will raise questions on the People of the Cave. These same people will question Ruqayyah."[177] This sacred trope does key work in Ruqayyah's legend, and the assertion here is a striking one – those that do not accept Ruqayyah's *ghaybat*, a distinctly Shi'a idea, are as those who question the veracity of the Qurān.[178]

Ruqayyah's miraculous legend and the Islamic parables her story invoked did not end with her *ghaybat*. Indeed, the Hindus who visited her camp were so astonished and overwhelmed by her disappearance that they converted on the spot – validating 'Ali's claim that from Ruqayyah's presence in Lahore would spring a great nation of believers. Qureshi shares that after Ruqayyah's *ghaybat,* her caretaker Abdullah was told to marry a woman from the neighboring Hindu *Jhat* tribe. The woman was a cripple and going blind. But despite her sorry state, according to Qureshi, "Abdullah took every action at the command of his Lady. He prayed for guidance at Bibi Pak Daman and then married the woman. After their wedding, he brought his new wife to Ruqayyah and beseeched her for blessings. To their astonishment, she was cured with the blessing of this Lady. When they saw this miracle, 7,000 *Jhat* Hindus from her tribe converted on site."[179] The mass and spontaneous conversion of Hindus and followers of other religious was not a unique

[177] Qureshi, *Tarikh Bibian Pak Daman,* 200.
[178] Qureshi, *Tarikh Bibian Pak Daman,* 201.
[179] Qureshi, *Tarikh Bibian Pak Daman,* 145.

feature of Muslim hagiographic literature in the subject. Indeed, the obsession with conversion played a prominent role in narratives of Islamic figures, and similar parables existed in saintly devotional literature. Yet Qureshi notes that Ruqayyah's story in particular was similar to one of Fatima bint Muhammad's known miracles, recited as the *Bibi Ki Kahani* amongst Shi'a Muslims in the subcontinent to beseech Fatima's intercession for a particular wish. In the prayer, Fatima attends a wedding of a Jewish woman, who had invited her just to shame the simplicity of Fatima's appearance. The angels, however, descended from heaven and dressed Fatima such that when she arrived, she emanated such divine light that the bride was overcome and collapsed. Despite their cruel intentions, Fatima was deeply remorseful that her presence caused such tragedy and quickly performed an ablution and began to pray. The bride was revived with Fatima's grace, and when she learned what happened she immediately repented for her devious actions and converted to Islam. 7,000 Jews of her tribe followed suit. The similarities between the two narratives are striking – the disbelieving others, the miraculous act of proof, and the spontaneous conversion of exactly 7,000. Like her parallels to Zaynab's role as witness and messenger, in this work Ruqayyah's life embodies multiple Shi'a parables, from Fatima's miracles to the rarest and most powerful instances of *ghaybat*. By drawing on these parables and constructing a miraculous portrayal of Ruqayyah, Qureshi made Bibi Pak Daman an unquestionably powerful site, one that was prophesized by 'Ali and as central to Islam as any other shrine. The tropes and parables of Qureshi's hagiography were decidedly Shi'a, but the appeal to embrace the shrine was national.

Sayyeda Ruqayyah Becomes 'Bibi Pak Daman'

What emerges from these narratives of Bibi Ruqayyah's life are the multitude of ways in which discussions about Bibi Pak Daman navigated a dual purpose: they validated the importance of Islam in South Asia, linking this shrine to the perceived Arab 'center' of the faith while simultaneously appropriating Ruqayyah into a national narrative. While the ambiguities of Ruqayyah's life allowed Bibi Pak Daman to be linked with a broader sacred geography and noted Shi'a figures, her narrative was deeply imbued with tropes that would resonate on a local and national level. In the early hagiographies from Chishti, Fawq, and Subhan, the fact that Ruqayyah chose Lahore and then converted its people en masse affirmed the case for the historic presence of Islam in the region. But her presence and the divine plan she represented could also be interpreted as the necessity for the creation of Pakistan. Indeed, the very justification for the establishment of the state rested on the notion that Islam was not just a foreign influence imposed on the local population but was organically rooted in the subcontinent; Islam's inherent incompatibility with Hinduism was exacerbated by the colonial structure and necessitated a separate state. Thus, Islam's historic presence - embodied by Ruqayyah - affirmed that a kind of religious distinctiveness had existed since the early age of Islam and was not merely created vis-à-vis India in the 20th century as the colonial enterprise wound down. She was, then, seen as the true mother of the great Islamic nation that was promised by 'Ali, just as Pakistan was the fulfillment of that promise.

The blessing of Ruqayyah's presence in Pakistan was repeated throughout literature and conscious effort was made to prove and affirm that she did arrive – and indeed belong – in the region. Unlike the majority of *pirs* and their descendants buried

across Pakistan who drew their influence from a clear line of hereditary descent, the ambiguities of Ruqayyah's story led to differing claims about who was buried at Bibi Pak Daman, reflected early on in Subhan's rebuttal of their skepticism. While the story that it was Ruqayyah bint 'Ali was a widely accepted one, some Sunni Muslims believed that this Ruqayyah was one of the daughters of Syed Ahmad Tokhta Tirmizi, a Sufi *pīr* who lived in the Lahore area in the 12th century. According to Qureshi, however, there was a great deal of evidence "and proof from history that the story of Syed Ahmad Tokhta was created for greed and religious hatred. These false stories have been spread to keep the Shi'a faithful from visiting the shrine and for the extremists to seize control of the site."[180] This assertion is not surprising, given the political tensions that were at play at the shrine during Qureshi's work and publication. Indeed, the debates and conflict that were to play out at Bibi Pak Daman in the aftermath of the government's takeover in 1967 were in part related to who was buried at the shrine – and as an extension, what rights that guaranteed particular pilgrims and caretakers. Qureshi states, "There is a live presence at Bibi Pak Daman. I hereby request the Auqaf Department not to damage the feelings and devotional practice of the pilgrims there."[181] Clearly, these interpretive portrayals of Ruqayyah had deep implications on the ground at Bibi Pak Daman. The difference between Sunni and Shi'a portrayals of Zaynab resulted in entirely different shrines and sacred geography. At Bibi Pak Daman, Sunni challenges delinked the shrine from Shi'a sacred geography.

While Qureshi's work was the most comprehensive hagiography on Ruqayyah and Bibi Pak Daman, published at a critical turning point in Pakistani and international

[180] Qureshi, *Tarikh Bibian Pak Daman,* 257.
[181] Qureshi, *Tarikh Bibian Pak Daman,* 253.

politics, the authenticity of the shrine and who was buried there were debated by pilgrims, residents, scholars, and politicians alike. Qureshi's articles from 1967-68 in support of the Bibi Pak Daman shrine were also directed at the government. Shortly after the Auqaf takeover, he noted, "The Department of Auqaf has now taken control of Bibi Pak Daman. There is hope that now the government will pay appropriate attention to this shrine." He would then pivot to a discussion of a critical verse in the Qurān, in Surah al-Shūra, in which the Prophet referred to respecting those near to him. Sunni Muslims had deliberately misunderstood this verse, he countered, though it was meant to refer to the family of the Prophet – and, by extension, Ruqayyah.[182] The hope for Auqaf intercession in supporting these claims would be met with deep disappointment, however. To his astonishment, he noted,

> In this holy and blessed shrine, when Sunnis arranged the yearly *urs* under the auspices of the Auqaf Department, within the boundaries of the shrine they not only had a *milad* and *naat khani*, drums, and musical evening, the *chadors* were spread by men on the holy grave! We inquired if these events had been approved by the Auqaf Department or by the permission of the Chairman of the Shi'a-Sunni Joint Committee [of Bibi Pak Daman], Hafiz Nazar Muhammad. If a Shi'a devotee is moved by the presence of his Bibi and begins to cry or recite a lament, it is not permitted, but the Sunnis can play music and engage in revelry – why is there such a difference?

For Qureshi, the disparity stemmed from a difference in interpretation; for Shi'as, Ruqayyah bint 'Ali's shrine should be a space of solemn commemoration of the tragedies of Karbala. Thus, an investment in that interpretation had implications for practice on the ground at the shrine. While the government had supported the belief that Bibi Pak Daman was Ruqayyah bint 'Ali, their accommodationist stance to the practices of the majority

[182] Muhammad Bakhsh Shah Qureshi, "Aaj ke halāt," *Shaheed Lahore,* 5th December 1967.

Sunni population angered Qureshi. He warned in one of his articles against an over-privileging of the Sunni majority perspective in the affairs of the shrine: "Our nation is going through a difficult and delicate time, and it is necessary that we do not allow sectarian divisions to continue and block our development."[183] The country, so recently torn apart by the loss of East Pakistan into Bangladesh in 1971, could not afford the strife that would result from curtailing Shi'a religious expression, especially with the Shi'a population of Pakistan galvanizing behind new communal organizations.[184]

The events and his advocacy promoted responses in the local press. In an article by a resident of the Bibi Pak Daman published by a local gazette in 1972, the author argued about the recent conflicts that "while there have been various schools of thought regarding this shrine, often conflicting, all is hearsay."[185] In a nod to the controversy that still existed at the time of publication, the first part of Qureshi's text is devoted to dozens of 'authentication' letters and testimonials from politicians, parliamentarians, academics, and religious leaders attesting both to the quality of his research and the unquestionable fact that Ruqayyah did travel to Lahore and ended up at the shrine at Bibi Pak Daman. One such letter from Member of Parliament Nawab Nawazish 'Ali Khan, written in August 1973, notes that on behalf of this project, he had "gathered extensive information from Iran and Iraq and traveled to verify if there was any evidence of Ruqayyah's grave in any of these other areas. I found none. She did not travel through Kufa and Damascus as a prisoner, nor did she return to Medina. Those Arabs that I spoke to on my visit,

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[183] Muhammad Bakhsh Shah Qureshi, *Al-Assad*, 26th July, 1972.
[184] In 1972, the Imamia Student Organization would be formed, a turning point for the mobilization – and militancy – of Shi'a youth. See Hassan Abbas, "Shi'ism and Sectarian Conflict in Pakistan: Identity Politics, Iranian Influence, and Tit-for-Tat Violence," *Occasional Paper Series: Combating Terrorism Center*, Sept. 22, 2010, West Point.
[185] Iqbal Saeed, "Mazarat Bibian Pak Damanā," *Arafat-e-Lahore*, Issue 4, Sept/Oct. 1972.

including religious leaders, verified that she left Karbala and traveled to Lahore with a large caravan."[186] As in the case with the Sayyeda Zaynab shrine, personal testimonies and witness confirmation served as proof of history. In this hagiography, national figures lent their personal credibility to the belief that it was Ruqayyah buried at Bibi Pak Daman.

While the debate was certainly more complex than Qureshi's assertions, given how much of Ruqayyah's story read as legendary reflections of more historically 'known' Shi'a figures rather than historical record, the government's position was also that Ruqayyah was the daughter of 'Ali. Hagiographies endorsed by the government after its takeover and written by various authors consistently worked to disprove any other theories, an indication of a broad political and religious commitment to the notion that a daughter of 'Ali had made her way to Pakistan and been the first to bring Islam to the subcontinent, as was divinely ordained. Her shrine could be a site of national unity, Qureshi notes, as it was his hope that "this site becomes one of great activity and harmony, and no Pakistani from any *fiqh* is unwelcome here."[187] Years later, after years of violent political and religious conflicts waged in the name of Islam, in the 1990 hagiography endorsed by the Auqad Department and written by a Sunni scholar, Masood Hashmi, he laments,

> For us, the people of Pakistan, what a fortunate blessing that for our spiritual guidance, one of the children of Ali came as a guest to our land, but we have not recognized her as she deserved. If we had, today Bibi Pak Daman's blessed shrine would have been built in a manner that suited her standing…. Many people do not agree upon how she came to Lahore, but

[186] Letter from Nawazish Ali Khan to Maulavi Muhammad Bakhsh Shah Qureshi, August 1, 1973. Republished in *Tarikh-e-Bibian Pak Daman*, 73.
[187] Qureshi, *Tarikh-e-Bibian Pak Daman*, 257.

> the truth is that most people are not knowledgeable about the history of Islam. Her presence is found in the history of Hind and Sindh if one knows how to look.[188]

Thus, Hashmi notes, the cause for controversy should not be in the identity of the graves in the shrine but in the way that Pakistanis had cared for this blessing that had been bestowed upon them – a critique of moral and physical decay and the inability to safeguard the nation that one sees mirrored in a variety of different discourses at the end of the 20th century. Nevertheless, the preoccupation with proving Ruqayyah's identity pervaded much of the local literature, because the debate had significant implications for nationalist interpretations. Her presence was often referred to as a favor bestowed upon the nation that had to continuously prove itself worthy of her presence – especially since she remained alive and watchful over her devotees. A shrine for a figure of this stature was a validation of both Shi'ism in particular and Islam in general on the subcontinent, and it bolstered the nationalist mystique of Pakistan.

The presence of Ruqayyah and the primacy of Islam also constructed a simple and alternate narrative about Pakistan at a time when the very basis of the nation was being questioned in political and literary spheres. Zia ul-Haq's coup in 1977 shook the foundations of the state, ushering in a period of military rule combined with an official policy of conservative Deobandi Islamization. Far from the secular democracy envisioned by Pakistan's founders, the state would morph into an authoritarian and ideological state – but the question of which Islam remained, especially in a nation still struggling to form a positive articulation of national identity beyond its opposition to

[188] Hashmi, *Makhdooma Bibi Ruqayyah,* 159.

India.[189] Indeed, state-sponsored Islamization exacerbated sectarian and religious divisions as the regime promulgated hundreds of new laws that affected every aspect of public and private life in its new *Nizām-e-Mustafa* (Order of the Prophet). It would prompt a correspondent for the *Pakistan Times* to question, "When we say that the country's laws will be brought into conformity with the Holy Qurān every Muslim knows the book referred to, but when we say *sunnah*…we cannot point out any book acceptable to the *ummah* as a safe, secure, and current authority."[190] Pakistan's founders had deliberately shied from integrating Islamic ordinances into the workings of the government, for fear of popular divisions, their inherent secularism, and the opposition of the *ulama* against coopting Islamic rule. The authoritarian regime under Zia and human rights abuses would also give birth to a new genre of short stories that recalled the trauma of partition, an internal challenge to the hegemonic notion of Pakistan as an inevitable

[189] The historiography behind Partition, and in particular what the ideology and popularity of the Pakistan Movement was, is an expansive topic. Ayesha Jalal's work on Jinnah is one of the most widely cited interpretations of the Pakistan Movement, though her analysis focuses firmly on 'high politics.' According to Jalal, Jinnah was driven through partition negotiations by a single-minded commitment to Pakistan, but this stemmed from his desire to be the "sole spokesman" for India's unified Muslims. It is from Jalal's work, however, that historiography would begin to question Jinnah's desire to establish a separate state and the inner workings and contestations amongst various interests would emerge. See Ayesha Jalal, *The Sole Spokesman: Jinnah, the Muslim League and the Demand for Pakistan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985). Farzana Shaikh would respond with a kind of 'history from below', tracing what the concept of a "Muslim community" meant intellectually and how that translated into perceptions of the Pakistan Movement. See Farzana Shaikh, *Community and Consensus in Islam: Muslim Representation in Colonial India, 1860-1947* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989). Gyanendra Pandey in particular would focus on micro histories to analyze the formation of Muslim identity in pre-partition India and argued that identity creation was an intertwined with the local community. Gyanendra Pandey, *The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1984).

[190] "Nizām-e-Mustafa," *Pakistan Times,* May 3, 1983.

and preferable historical endpoint.[191] The narrative of Ruqayyah bringing the true message of Islam to Pakistan after the events of Karbala provided an implicit challenge to Zia's vision of the Islamic state and his *Nizām-e-Mustafa*. It crafted an alternative vision of what that Islam was – transmitted by a woman, miraculous and spiritual rather than retributive, and, most critically, coherent with a Shi'a vision of history and theology. The narrative-cum-history of Ruqayyah was critical to the ideological opposition to the state-enforced Islam of Zia. It created a space for Shi'as to assert their essentiality to the nation in a regime whose brand of Islam sought to delineate the bounderies of what constituted 'authentic' religious behavior and eliminate all deviations.[192] Ruqayyah's Islam – Shi'a, transmitted by a woman and miraculous – provided a lived counterpoint to Zia's Islam, inextricably linked to the power dynamics of the military as the defenders of the Pakistani state.

Yet Bibi Pak Daman also created an argument for the distinct sacred territoriality of Pakistan. The idea of Pakistan was based largely on the idea of a political and religious nationalism, with the partition simply delineating areas of Muslim majority. Few arguments were made over the sacredness of the land itself, as was common in many new nation states post-WWII.[193] By the publication of *Tarikh-e-Bibian Pak Daman,* however,

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[191] For more on the challenges of memory and meaning-making regarding Partition, see David Gilmartin, "Partition, Pakistan, and South Asian History: In Search of a Narrative," *The Journal of Asian Studies,* Vol. 57, No. 4 (Nov. 1998), 1068-1095.

[192] Amendments to the Penal Code of Pakistan and the Criminal Procedure Code would forbid speaking against or causing dishonor to the *Sahaba* (companions of the Prophet), who Shi'a Muslims felt usurped the righteous leadership of 'Ali. Further amendments would also declare the Ahmadi sect as non-Muslims, making it punishable for Ahmadis to call themselves Muslims. See Mumtaz Ahmad, "The Crescent and the Sword: Islam, the Military, and Political Legitimacy in Pakistan, 1977-1985," *Middle East Journal,* Vol. 50, No. 3 (Summer, 1996), 372-386.

[193] The most direct example of ideological arguments on the sacredness of land existed in the new Israel state. Nadia Abu El Haj, for example, has traced the development of the link between

Pakistan had waged a disastrous war with India over East Pakistan, losing a huge swath of Muslim-majority territory from Pakistan and leading to serious questions about the basis of what national identity was in the face of Muslim opposition. Yet in the wake of national trauma, more answers emerged, including a renewed emphasis on the geographic and religious identity of the new Pakistan. "Gone was the need to straddle, schizophrenically, both sides of the subcontinent," wrote a scholar in 1979.[194] Gone, too, was a significant chunk of Pakistan's Hindu majority. The state left was more contiguous, more Muslim, and more focused on its Islamic roots. Qureshi's emphasis on the sacredness of the ground of Bibi Pak Daman reflected the new commitment to the territorial importance of Pakistan, as Lahore itself was the heart of Pakistan's largest province.

Thus, the second aspect of the duality between Bibi Pak Daman's transnational connections and nationalized milieus was the way that Ruqayyah's story became imbued with references to known saints and seminal events in the constructed national narrative. After the process of molding her as a central figure in Shi'a martyrology, she would be transformed into a national legend. Qureshi notes the most commonly known reference, that of the connection between Ruqayyah and Ali Hujweri, Data Ganj Bakhsh, the patron

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archaeology and the creation of the spatial foundations and ideological contours of settler nationhood from the 1880s to 1950s in both the colonial *and* national projects. See Nadia Abu El Haj, *Facts on the Ground: Archaeological Practice and Territorial Self-Fashioning in Israeli Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001). Firoozeh Kashani-Sabet has illuminated the emerging existence of land-based conceptions of 'Iran' in the 19th and early twentieth century, grounding the concept of the national community to territoriality and exploring how geography – both physical and cultural borders – helped create a developing sense of identity. See Firoozeh Kashani-Sabet, *Frontier Fictions: Shaping the Iranian Nation, 1804-1946* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

[194] William Richter, "The Political Dynamics of Islamic Resurgence in Pakistan," *Asian Survey,* Vol. 19, No. 6 (June, 1979), 549.

saint of Lahore. He argues that multiple historical sources noted that Hujweri was a devoted pilgrim to Bibi Pak Daman and would spend days in contemplation and prayer at the shrine. Such was Hujweri's regard for Ruqayyah's exalted status that he was said to have crawled miles on hands and knees on his approach to Bibi Pak Daman. There, he would often spend weeks on end in solitary meditation.[195] This narrative serves a dual purpose: it verified the contested timeline of Ruqayyah's arrival in the subcontinent and tied her to a nationally revered figure. Hujweri lived in the 11th century, he reasoned, and as such Ruqayyah must have arrived in the subcontinent earlier – too early for her to be a daughter of the Sufi saint Ahmad Tokhta, who lived in the 12th century. In fact, the hagiography notes, because the vast majority of Sufi saints in the subcontinent trace their descent to 'Ali, they all sought to pay their respects to Ali's daughter. As such, the great saints of the subcontinent, from Lal Shahbaz Qalandar and Syed Muinuddin Chishti to Khwaja Nazamuddin Auliya, all visited the shrine of Bibi Pak Daman in their travels.[196]

These narratives reveal a clear effort to prove Ruqayyah's existence in Pakistan by tying her to famed individuals, appropriating her into the national context. By extension, these associations further sacralized the shrine of Bibi Pak Daman, both as a hallowed national and sectarian space. A visit to Bibi Pak Daman was thus implicitly positioned as honoring the national legacy. Nowhere is this clearer than in the association of Muhammad bin Qasim, the legendary Umayyad conqueror of Sindh and the Punjab, and Ruqayyah. In instructional textbooks written for Pakistan Studies courses through the

[195] Qureshi, *Tarikh Bibian Pak Daman,* 322. While the Data Ganj Bakhsh shrine has grown into a massive and populated complex, there remained a dedicated marble slab in Bibi Pak Daman that marked the spot where Ali Hujweri spent time in prayer, receiving wisdom and guidance from Bibi Ruqayyah.
[196] Qureshi, *Tarikh Bibian Pak Daman,* 323.

1980s, Pakistan's history began with the 8th century conquest of Muhammad bin Qasim. M.D. Zafar's *A Textbook of Pakistan Studies,* a text for Secondary levels of education, narrates to students that Pakistan as a distinct historical entity "came to be established for the first time when the Arabs under Muhammad bin Qasim occupied Sind and Multan."[197] His tie to Ruqayyah is made explicit in Hashmi's 1990 hagiography, in which Muhammad bin Qasim was allegedly among those sent to wage war against Ruqayyah but was captured.[198] When he was informed of the woes of the family of the Prophet and the cruelty of Umayyads, he cursed his former rulers. He then proceeded to "raise the flag of Islam in all of Sindh" in the name of Imam Husayn, and when he returned to Damascus, he was condemned to death for his betrayal of the Umayyad regime. Thus, in Ruqayyah's hagiography, the genesis of Pakistan was a Shi'a one. This connection reveals much about the distinct investment that local hagiographies displayed in crafting an expansive narrative for Ruqayyah's place in Pakistan's constructed history.[199]

Linking Ruqayyah to a prominent early nationalist and Islamic hero illuminates a fascinating desire to both authenticate her presence in the subcontinent and place her in an accessible local context, even as the shrine drew much of its spiritual authenticity and salience from the links to the broader Islamic map. According to both Qureshi and then Hashmi, the head of Ruqayyah's army and the man who captured Muhammad bin Qasim was Abdullah Abu Hashim bin Muhammad Hanafiyya, a grandson of 'Ali. Abu Hashim was later killed in the service of protecting Ruqayyah's caravan "and to this day his grave

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[197] M. D. Zafar, *A Text Book of Pakistan Studies* (Lahore, 1988), 23.
[198] In 712 AD, the fiercely pro-Umayyad Governor of Iraq, Hajjaj bin Yousef, dispatched his young nephew Muhammad bin Qasim to conquer Sindh in the name of the Umayyad dynasty.
[199] Hashmi, *Makhdooma Bibi Ruqayya,* 141.

is in the Clifton district of Karachi, known as Abdullah Shah Ghazi."[200] The shrine of Abdullah Shah Ghazi was a sprawling complex in Pakistan's largest city, and the saint regarded as the patron saint of Karachi. The link to Karachi is notable; though Bibi Pak Daman was located in Lahore, this narrative again placed the shrine within a national matrix, associating it with personalities who were deeply rooted in regional and national consciousness. These figures had all made an indelible mark on the subcontinent and occupied central roles in the imagined cultural heritage of Pakistan. While the vast majority of *pīrs* and shrines in Pakistan resonated on a local level, in a nation where these provincial, ethnic, and religious divisions had become deeply exacerbated, Ruqayyah's life connected those sites in an overarching national narrative. No longer was Sayyeda Ruqayyah an Arab exile born from Medina, raised with the values and teachings of that milieu, fleeing religious persecution. In these writings, one can see her as the mother come home to establish her roots, the first to bring the message of Islam to the nation and whom all the great male heroes and saints revered.

The numerous local and Islamic tropes interwoven into Ruqayyah's arrival in the region similarly worked to transform Sayyeda Ruqayyah into Bibi Pak Daman. Multiple sources detailed events that invoked the most prominent trope in the subcontinent – that of the destruction of idols and the power of Islam to uproot 'false' religions. According to all the evolving hagiographies of Ruqayyah, the inhabitants of Lahore were devoted idol-worshippers, ruled by royal courts that patronized temples to false gods and placed their faith in duplicitous fortune-tellers. However, it would be problematic for Ruqayyah's message to exist alongside these unbelievers, since the truth of Islam should be powerful

[200] Hashmi, *Makhdooma Bibi Ruqayya,* 142.

enough to uproot *shirk*.[201] For many noted Islamic figures, legends of their ability to affect conversions and prove idols to be false are critical components in establishing their piety and righteous nature. This trope is echoed in Ruqayyah's life. As she traveled from Karbala, her sermons attracted masses that were disillusioned by the inequality of the Hindu caste system and political control of the Brahims, converting in large quantities to Islam. The strength of the Hindu regime was no match for the truth of Ruqayyah's message and the stories of grief she had endured. Like the Islamic heroes of lore, the false gods could not withstand her power as a proselytizer.

These hagiographies operate as history, deliberately rejecting the idea of these stories approximating mythology. Yet Ruqayyah's appeal draws emotional resonance from these powerful tropes, such as the spontaneous dousing of the fire of the fortunetellers in the courts and the destruction of its idols. Qureshi mentions this narrative, noting that when Ruqayyah and her companions arrived in Lahore, the Raja was alerted to their presence when the fire that burned in the courts suddenly went out and could not be relit. A brief pamphlet written in 1983 by Fazal Ahmad Nishān, one of the shrine's caretakers, or *sajjada nashins*, expanded on this legend. Not surprisingly, as someone directly involved with and benefitting from the promotion of the Bibi Pak Daman, Nishān's short booklet is replete with references to Ruqayyah's miracles and the close relationship she had with the caretaker Abdullah – who he alleged was his ancestor. While the Auqaf takeover had removed many of the *sajjada nashin* from their primary role in the day-to-day administration of the shrine, their ties within the community and

[201] *Shirk* is commonly translated as idol-worshipping, though a more literal translation would denote a meaning closer to 'association.' For more, see G.R. Hawting, *The Idea of Idolatry and the Emergence of Islam: From Polemic to History* (London: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

ability to barter access to the inner sacred space of the shrine made them vested parties in the narrative of Ruqayyah bint 'Ali's miraculous presence. He narrates that when Ruqayyah stepped foot in the Hindu raja's land, their idols were taken "as if by storm and fell to the ground in pieces. The raja consulted his court fortune-tellers, who confirmed for him that there had been some Arabs that had arrived from the family of the Muhammad. It was their appearance that had caused the commotion."[202] This miraculous event was certainly emblematic of how Ruqayyah was portrayed, intertwined with divine mysticism and legendary acts. This story was proof of the power of Islam as the 'true' religion, embodied by Ruqayyah, and the fragility of the false faiths that she came to expose. This occurrence, however, was not unique to the history of Bibi Pak Daman; one finds that the trope of idol destruction was particularly pervasive in the region, perhaps reflecting uneasiness at the coexistence of Islam and Hinduism. Indeed, the accounts related to the most popular Muslim figures often addressed their particular interactions with idol-worshipping, revealing concerted attempts to explain how these practices continued, even as Islam gained a larger foothold. Thus, in some way, these messengers must all have acted to undermine Hinduism, either by destroying the inanimate objects that its followers worship or by converting the local populations to Islam. Ruqayyah's story embodies both of these components and fits into the larger matrix of South Asian Islam. The trope also harkens back to perhaps the most memorable and, ironically, iconic moments in the history of Islam in South Asia. In 1025, Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni, "the Afghan iconoclast of myth and legend" sacked the Shiva temple at Somnath, Gujrat,

[202] Fazal-Ahmad Nishan, *"Hazrat Bibi Pak Damana, Sayyeda Ruqayyah: Rowdha Kahain Hain?"* Lahore: July 15, 1983.

refusing to allow the ransom of the main temple idol by claiming, allegedly, that he was a breaker of idols, not a seller of them.[203] Mahmud of Ghazni's words invoked the actions of the prophet Abraham, who destroyed the idols of his father, a maker and seller of idols. This preoccupation with undermining idolatry, either through destruction of the idols or the conversion of the idolaters, reveals a conscious anxiety in how to describe Islam's continued existence alongside Hinduism without ever fully vanquishing or supplanting it. Interestingly, Qureshi notes that it was Mahmud Ghaznavi who first commissioned the first concrete structure in Afghan architectural style over the graves of Bibi Ruqayyah and her family.[204] As Mahmud Ghaznavi was commonly perceived as a virulent iconoclast, it is notable that the initial construction of the shrine is attributed to him, since the building of shrines and the rituals practiced in these places remains a source of heated debate. Similarly, the extension of Bibi Pak Daman and the creation of *waqf* around the site are attributed to the Mughal Emperor Akbar, another fascinating link across time and space to the famed names of local history.[205]

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Over a century of hagiographies, Ruqayyah bint 'Ali's life would provide a blank slate onto which emerging ideas of Islam in the subcontinent were projected. Unlike the historical Zaynab, the outlines of Ruqayyah's story were ambiguous. Yet as more complex interpretations were constructed of Zaynab's role in Shi'ism, hagiographies about Ruqayyah would come to reflect similar tropes and characteristics and develop a

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[203] Jamal J. Elias, "(Un)making Idolatry: From Mecca to Bamiyan." *Journal of Historic Preservation, History, Theory and Criticism*, Vol. IV, No.2, Winter 2007. pg 24-25
[204] Qureshi, *Tarikh Bibian Pak Daman,* 323. See also Masood Raza Khaki, *Bibian Pak Daman* (Lahore: Haidri Press, 1998), 53-54.
[205] Subhan, *Sufism,* 122

legendary portrayal that resonated with powerful Shi'a references and themes. For devotees, the implications of a daughter of 'Ali buried in Pakistan were always monumental: it had allowed them to link Bibi Pak Daman – and therefore Pakistan – to seminal events in the formative years of Islamic and Shi'a history. It affirmed that the lands that would become Pakistan were vital at Islam's inception, rather than a much later, peripheral recipient of Muhammad's message. By the publication of the seminal hagiography on Bibi Pak Daman, however, Ruqayyah's life and the history of Bibi Pak Daman would be intertwined with ideological conflicts over the nature of the relationship between Islam and the state and the anxieties over the nation-building project. The narratives that emerged repeatedly emphasized Bibi Pak Daman's central place both in sacred Islamic geography and national mythology. While Ruqayyah would draw her divine and miraculous power from her association with the *Ahl al-Bayt* and the central traumas of Shi'ism, a matrix of links and associations between popular saints, national heroes, and historical Islamic figures would be constructed to ground Bibi Pak Daman as the original national figure – the mother who gave birth to a great Islamic nation.

Chapter Three
"The Center for all Shi'a Faithful": the Sayyeda Zaynab, the *ahl* al-Murtadha, and 'being Shi'a'

In 1952, just a few years after Syrian independence, the renowned historian, scholar, and Arabic linguist Muhammad Kurd 'Ali published *Ghawtat Dimashq,* a text describing the important landmarks, constructions, and ancient history of human settlement in the rich agricultural region surrounding Damascus.[206] In it, Kurd 'Ali noted briefly that there was a shrine in the Ghawta region that was "among the most beautifully furnished mosques" in the area. Despite its immediate aesthetic appeal, Kurd 'Ali did not dwell on a description of this site beyond this cursory mention, noting simply that this shrine had benefitted greatly from the donations recently given by mostly Iranian pilgrims, who together had contributed to make the otherwise anonymous site worth noting.[207] For Kurd Ali, the shrine did not hold a specific religious or historical value worth elaborating beyond its aesthetic characteristics. Instead, he explained that the mosque was a local site, named after one of the many pious women of the *Ahl al-Bayt* who had traveled through Damascus but whose lives and lineages were difficult to trace. While the shrine merited brief mention in the work of this prominent Arab literary figure, in the same year, however, Muhsin al-Amīn, the popular Shi'a *marja'* of Damascus, would be buried at the same Sayyeda Zaynab shrine – a shrine he had hoped would

[206] Kurd 'Ali was a towering figure in the Syrian intellectual scene and the author of *Khitāt al-Shām*, a six volume history of Greater Syria. Kurd 'Ali's career spanned the end of the Ottoman Empire, through Faysali and Mandate Syria into the independent state, at times fleeing Egypt to escape persecution by various authorities. A prolific writer, Kurd 'Ali published newspaper, journals, manuscripts, and biographies, served as Minister of Education in Syria, and as the first president of the Academy of the Arabic Language, founded by Faysal I of Syria in 1918. For more, see Joseph H Escovitz, "Orientalists and Orientalism in the Writings of Muhammad Kurd 'Ali," *International Journal of Middle East Studies,* Vol. 15, No. 1 (Feb., 1983), 95-109.
[207] Muhammad Kurd 'Ali, *Ghawtat Dimashq* (Damascus: Matba'at al-Tarqī, 1952), 178.

become a focal galvanizing point for the Shi'a community of Syria. Al-Amīn's funeral would draw a massive congregation of *ulama*, pilgrims, local residents, and shrine dignitaries that overflowed the boundaries of the small site.[208] Al-Amīn's death would coincide with a new focus on the Sayyeda Zaynab shrine in the aftermath of Syrian independence, efforts he had encouraged in his lifetime. An administrative committee had recently been convened at the Sayyeda Zaynab shrine for the purpose of expanding and promoting the site, formed at the urging of al-Amīn, who had long endorsed the affairs at the shrine. The Lajna' Ashrāf 'alā Maqām al-Sayyeda Zaynab would publish a new architectural and fundraising plan that year, aimed at "improving and expanding the site of Sayyeda Zaynab for the comfort of her devotees" and to give appropriate attention to "a historic Islamic site in our country" which had yet to receive its proper efforts and due.[209]

[208] *Tashyi'i al-Marhūm al-Syed al-Amīn fi Sahn al-Sayyeda Zaynab Alayhā as-salām: taliy'ah mawkib janāzah al-Marhūm al-Syed Muhsin al-Amīn fi Damishq*. Photograph, Majma' al-Sayyeda Zaynab li al-Ma'lūmāt wa al-Abhāth, Murtadha Family Private Papers, Sitt Zaynab, Syria.

[209] Khatah al-Jadīda lil Maqām al-Sharif al-Sayyeda Zaynab. File 12, Majma' al-Sayyeda Zaynab li al-Ma'lūmāt wa al-Abhāth, Murtadha Family Private Papers, Sitt Zaynab, Syria. See also Muhammad Fakhri Zakariyya, "Mintaqat al-sayyida zaynab bi- al-shām," *al-Mawsim,* 1, No. 4 (1989), 230.

(Figure 3.1: Funeral of Muhsin al-Amīn)

The contrast between these different understandings of the Sayyeda Zaynab shrine 1952 is not surprising. For intellectuals and political leaders, the newly independent Syria had a rich history of architectural, cultural, and religious landmarks that were coopted in the service of the powerful ideological currents of the time – pan-Islamism, Arab nationalism, and greater Syrian nationalism.[210] In contrast, the Sayyeda Zaynab shrine

[210] The dominant paradigms in the historiography on Syria are a complicated mix of texts, and a complete bibliography is too extensive to be dealt with in full here. For more on Arab nationalism, see C. Ernest Dawn, *From Ottomanism to Arabism: Essays on the Origins of Arab Nationalism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1973); Rashid Khalidi, Lisa Anderson, Muhammad Muslih, and Reeva Simon (eds), *The Origins of Arab Nationalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991); for more on Greater Syrian nationalism, see Daniel Pipes,

appeared to be a more modest space, one that had resonated for years on a spiritual level amongst the region's Shi'as but had yet to achieve widespread importance as a place of pilgrimage and Islamic devotion. Yet the efforts by shrine authorities to promote the Sayyeda Zaynab shrine as a critical Islamic and national space were not new in 1952, however, as focus on the political and religious importance of the shrine had increased during the Mandate period.[211] While pilgrimage to the shrine cities in Iraq and Iran had been firmly entrenched for centuries as part of an institutional network that emerged through the promotion of both political authorities and prominent *ulama* that drew their influence from their associations with these shrines, the Sayyeda Zaynab remained a modest gravesite in comparison.[212] Yet the developments towards Syrian independence and the complex project of nation-building, coupled with new transnational alliances between Shi'a networks and more assertive narrative portrayals of the life and importance of Zaynab would create momentum behind the expansion of the Sayyeda Zaynab shrine. From a small, family-dominated shrine to a tragic female Shi'a saint, the shrine would be promoted and actively expanded through the 1950s by individual, community, and official channels, reflecting the changing dynamics of religious patronage and politics in

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Greater Syria: The History of an Ambition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); Philip Khoury's substantial work on the Syrian nationalist movement is instructive, but a brief overview is found in his article "Continuity and Change in Syrian Political Life: The Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries," *The American Historical Review,* Vol. 96, No. 5, (December 1991), 1389.

[211] The French Mandate in Syria was established after the end of Faysal's short-lived Kingdom of Greater Syria and the April 1920 San Remo conference, which gave France and the French General Henri Gouraud administrative control. While an independence treaty was ratified in 1936, Syria was occupied by the Vichy French troops in 1941. Though the Mandate was unilaterally terminated earlier by the French, the last troops French troops departed Syria in April 1946. See Statement of General de Gaulle concerning the Mandate for Syria and Lebanon, November 29, 1941, in *Digest of International Law,* ed. Marjorie M. Whitman, vol. 1 (Washington, D.C.: US Government Printing Office, 1963), 680-681.

[212] See "Introduction" for growth of *ziyārat*

the newly independent states of the region. The rapid expansion of the Sayyeda Zaynab in the years following World War II coincided with the evolving reinterpretation and conceptualization of the role of Zaynab in the Shiite faith in the 20th century and the importance that was placed on *ziyārat* to her shrine, both as state officials encouraged pilgrimage and Shiite faithful sought her intercession. As new narratives and religious interpretations were constructed in Shi'a hagiography, so too would *ziyārat* to the Sayyeda Zaynab shrine be encouraged, a symbiotic relationship emerging between narrative and space. Through the appeals of shrine leaders and religious authorities, the contours of a Shi'a community in transition are revealed, grappling with and producing new structures of power and identity. By the end of the turbulent 1970s the Sayyeda Zaynab shrine would grow into a critical national and transnational space, a site onto which geopolitical alliances, transnational Shi'a networks, and competing ideologies about the nature of religion in the modern Syrian state would play out.

The Sayyeda Zaynab shrine was a socially constructed space, one shaped by practice, the politics of the shrine's construction and expansion, and narratives about the importance of Zaynab and Shi'a sites in the postwar era. As such it formed an *internal* frontier shrine, a concept borrowed from Juan Cole's work on Shi'a shrines, a space that became a barometer for ways of 'being Shi'a' in particular historical moments. It was a space onto which meaning and practice were mapped by a range of forces that sought to impose a coherent view of transnational Shi'ism or the nation. It reflected the tensions of nation-building in the modern Syrian state, between familial authority, the political role of the *ulama*, patronage networks, government interest, and Syria's changing relationship with its neighbors. It was caught in its own complex relationship with Iran and the Iraqi

shrine cities, mediating distinctly Shi'a appeals even as it was framed as a site of national heritage. Yet these developments also underscore the different ways of 'being Shi'a' in the independence era. With the Ba'thist coup of 1963 and subsequent split in the party based on regional and sectarian divides, the rise of Hafez al-Assad and the Alawī coalition in 1970, and Syrian involvement in the Lebanese Civil War, the pull outwards on the Sayyeda Zaynab shrine would take on new dimensions. The presence of Zaynab's shrine gave the new secular government a unique tool through which it bolstered its religious authority, even as it sought to manage its link to a minority Shi'a population and an ever-growing shrine.

Thus, the Sayyeda Zaynab would come to reflect Syria's own ambiguous and complex relationship with religion in the state. On the ground, the growth of the shrine from the Mandate period to the rise of the Ba'athist state would also change both the scale and composition of devotees, leading to debates over whose authority to follow and which religious imperatives to fulfill. By the outbreak of the Iranian revolution, the Sayyeda Zaynab shrine had grown to capture a powerful emotional, political, and ideological resonance and would reflect the construction and challenges to meaning-making for Syria and its neighbors. The shrine's contrasts also mirrored the changing facets of Damascus itself – an urban capital dominated by Sunni Arab nationalists, a cosmopolitan center laying claim to the heritage of the imperial Umayyad dynasty, and yet a city that would be transformed by new Shi'a alliances, refugees, and the growing institutions at the Sayyeda Zaynab.

The growth of the shrine and *ziyārat* to the Sayyeda Zaynab would thus produce a study in contrasts, resisting simple narratives about the structure of authority and religion

in Syria, with the contradictions often played out on the space of the shrine. The shrine that would emerge in the post-war decades was essentially new, with the mass expansion in construction, pilgrimage, and significance bearing little resemblance to the Sayyeda Zaynab of the 19th century. Unlike the Shi'a shrine cities that had developed over centuries, the Sayyeda Zaynab was a modern shrine – one that would emerge out of the particularities and vicissitudes of the 20th century. Yet the discourse, rhetoric, and constructed language of piety around the shrine position it as a traditional site of authority and intercession; it aspired to a long, unbroken history, though in narrative, finances, and politics it was the product of modern framework of conditions and interactions. As Talal Asad has noted, the concept of tradition was a powerful one in Islam; indeed, it was its defining feature, Asad argued: "if one wants to write an anthropology of Islam, one should begin, as Muslims do, from the concept of a discursive tradition that includes and relates itself to the founding texts of the Qurān and the *hadith*."[213] Political leaders, religious authorities, and pilgrims alike would position the Sayyeda Zaynab shrine as embodying a linear tradition from the Qurān and the Prophet's *hadith*, collapsing a long history of changes and negotiations into the space of the shrine. Much like in the construction of national narratives, the forces at play on the shrine argued for an unambiguous history while engaging in the production of memory – an opposition elaborated on by French historian Pierre Nora in his seminal work *Les Lieux de Mémoire*. "Memory," Nora argued, "insofar as it is affective and magical, only accommodates those facts that suit it; it nourishes recollections that may be out of focus or telescopic, global or detached, particular or symbolic…memory installs remembrance within the

[213] Asad, *Idea of an Anthropology of Islam,* 14.

sacred."[214] Yet despite claims to tradition and religious authenticity, the politics of the shrine would require new religious adaptions and concerns for the profane. The Sayyeda Zaynab shrine would be couched in language that melded arguments about modernity and development with tradition, blurring the divide between what 'old' and 'new' meant and redefining authenticity.[215] Unlike other shrines in Syria that had been 'rediscovered' at the prompting of outside interests, the Sayyeda Zaynab shrine committee and supporters laid claim to a rhetoric of indigenous support and benefit, an authentic expression of national religious and political interest. The arguments also challenged a hegemonic notion of what 'modernization' meant in the context of Shi'ism and the state.

The development of the Sayyeda Zaynab shrine from the late Mandate period through the 1970s also provides a microcosm to assess historiographic trends that have emerged in the discussion of Syrian nationalism and Shi'a transnationalism and challenges simple dichotomies in understanding identity construction and religious alliances. In 1938, at a time when George Antonius published his celebrated *Arab Awakening*, tracing the rise and evolution of Arab nationalism from Muhammad 'Ali, shrine authorities, religious leaders, and pilgrims were negotiating local, personal,

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[214] Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History", *Les Lieux de Mémoire,* trans. Marc Roudebush, accessed March 4, 2013. Online, http://www.history.ucsb.edu/faculty/marcuse/classes/201/articles/89NoraLieuxIntroRepresentations.pdf

[215] Christa Salamandra has written extensively on the spatial divisions of Damascus, with the 'old' colonial constructions that housed the early nationalist, primarily Sunni, elite was solely taken over by a more rural, ethnically and religious diverse population after the Ba'athist coup of 1963. While the Ba'ath regime displayed little interest in maintaining these areas, according to Salamandra the renewed interest and revitalization of old Damascus by the 'old elites' – predominantly Sunni families – was part of a cultural rejection of Ba'athis policies and the rapid influx into Damascus. Thus, Sunni elites sought to appropriate the old Damascus they had fled and turn it into a new, revitalized, and modern space. See Christa Salamandra, *A New Old Damascus: Authenticity and Distinction in Urban Syria* (Bloomington: University of Indiana, 2004).

religious, and transnational politics that challenged the linear narrative.[216] In more recent years, with the apparent decline of transnational religious and cultural solidarities, scholars have focused on established national borders as the default units of inquiry, privileging the concept of the nation as the category of analysis.[217] While this work accepts the nation insofar as the main forces at play on the shrine dealt within that construct, the Sayyeda Zaynab also shows the fluidity of these boundaries, even in the formative years of the nationalist movements. Indeed, the Sayyeda Zaynab shrine is illustrative of Roschanack Shaery-Eisenlohr's assertion that, especially in the context of local Shi'a communities, "translational ties can help the production of nationalism and appeals to transnational solidarities are often rooted in nationalist agendas."[218] The shrine also provides a unique counterpoint to a discourse that has privileged a simple Sunni versus Alawī construction of modern Syrian history, as well as disaggregated Shi'a spaces from Alawī power dynamics.[219] Instead, the history of the Sayyeda Zaynab shrine underscores the complex intersection of interests that have created space and meaning.

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[216] For more on the particular conditions of the development of Antonius' intellectual thought, including his engagement with the Palestinian question, his interactions with Sharif Husayn, and the influence of his secularly-oriented education, see Susan Silsby, "George Antonius: The Formative Years," *Journal of Palestine Studies,* Vo. 15, No. 4 (Summer, 1986), 81-98.

[217] The term 'category of analysis' is adapted here from Joan Scott and her article "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," in which she argues that gender "becomes a way of denoting 'cultural constructions' – the entirely social creation of ideas about appropriate roles for women and men." See Joan Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," *American Historical Review*, Vol. 91, No. 5, Dec. 1986, 1053-1075. In the same manner, I argue that, like the nation, the shrine space forms a category of analysis, a space that was constructed by cultural and social narratives and practice.

[218] Shaery Eisenlohr, *Shi'ite Lebanon,* 3.

[219] The Alawites have a complicated history in modern Syria, concentrated primarily in the region of Latakia, which had been granted autonomous rule by the French Mandate multiple times. The Alawites, known pejoratively as Nusayris during Ottoman rule, follow a mystical derivation of Shi'ism. Founded in the 9th century by Muhammad bin Nusayr, who claimed to be a favored follower of the 11th Shi'a Imam who entrusted to him a new mystical revelation "which was to constitute the nucleus of the Nusayrī doctrine." See "Nusayriyya." *Encyclopedia of Islam, Second*

Perhaps the most enduring paradigm in modern Syrian historiography has been the 'politics of the notables,' as articulated by Albert Hourani in the 1960s.[220] The 'politics of the notables' Hourani noted, emerged within a society dominated by "great families which…reside mainly in the city, draw their main strength from there, and *because* of their position in the city are able to dominate also a rural hinterland."[221] Hourani's work focused primarily on a Sunni elite urban class and privileged a top-down narrative of change, to the exclusion of other forces, a view that has been complicated by historians and anthropologists.[222] In the case of Sayyeda Zaynab, however, the confluence

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Edition. Eds. P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E Boswort et all. Brill Online, 2014. Accessed July 12, 2014. <http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/nus-ayriyya-COM_0876>

[220] First delivered at a conference in 1966, "Ottoman Reform and the Politics of the Notables" would become a seminal work in Middle East historiography, one that has been responded to, challenged, and adapted since. Hourani's article was first published in 1966 at the University of Chicago, then republished in his *The Emergence of the modern Middle East* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981). Hourani's work would shape the intellectual currents of the time, influencing Philip Koury's history of the notables in the French Mandate and nationalist movements. See Philip Khoury, *Urban Notables and Arab Nationalism: the Politics of Damascus 1860-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983). Hourani's thesis would find a receptive audience among the growing cadre of social historians focused on the politics of patronage and economic dependence in explaining social structures of the Middle East. For more on the development of the "politics of the notables", see Albert Hourani, "The Present State of Islamic and Middle Eastern Historiography," in *Europe and the Middle East* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980); Linda Schatkowski Schilcher, *Families in Politics: Damascene Factions and Estates of the 18th and 19th Centuries* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1985); Karl K. Barbir, *Ottoman Rule in Damascus, 1708-1758* (Princeton, N.J., 1980); Abraham Marcus, *The Middle East on the Eve of Modernity: Aleppo in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989).

[221] Albert Hourani, "Ottoman Reform and the Politics of Notables," in *The Emergence of the Modern Middle East* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 41.

[222] More recently, historian James Gelvin wrote a retrospective on the impact and endurance of Hourani's work, complicating a fully top-down narrative while still accepting the important role that notables played in the politics of the French Mandate and post-independence years. See James Gelvin, "The 'Politics of Notables' Forty Years After," *Middle East Studies Association Bulletin,* Vol. 40, No. 1 (June 2006), 19-29. The other aspect of the notables paradigm was put forth by Patrick Seale concurrently with Hourani's work – that the conservative urban class was overthrown by a younger intellectual middle class, those that would power the series of coups and revolutions that took hold of Syria in the decades following independence. The main actor of change in Seale's narrative is the Ba'ath party, "a revolutionary party of middle class

of private and communal efforts was critical, and the influence of prominent figures was key. The shrine operated under the custodianship of the Shi'a al-Murtadha family, a Damascene family from the Shi'a quarters of Hayy al-Amīn and Shurafa' that owned the *waqf* in Ghawta and operated agricultural land around the shrine. The Murtadha family drew on their considerable personal influence to propel the expansion of the Sayyeda Zaynab, capitalizing on their religious mandate as caretakers, a lineage traced to the Imams, and grounding their authenticity in the local, with a long history of landowning and family heritage in Syria. The members of the Murtadha family were central players in the efforts to promote the Sayyeda Zaynab shrine, as were some of the most respected and significant *marja'* of the 20th century, all exerting their influence and promoting particular political alignments. Yet they were also responding to mass support and transnational impulses, a factor often overlooked in Hourani's understanding of the notables. The Murtadha family provides a unique variation on the 'politics of the notables', with a Shi'a family that was not amongst the most traditionally elite Damascene families using its influence to galvanize support in favor of the shrine.[223] As such, I utilize Josh Landis' concept of the 'politics of the *za'ama*', loosely translated into politics of personal leadership, rather than a straightforward adaption of Hourani's

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intellectuals, bound by ideas rather than petty alliances…" See Patrick Seale, *The Struggle for Syria: A Study in Post-War Arab Politics, 1945-1958* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), 308. Seale's work would help frame the way Hourani's 'politics of the notables' were framed in subsequent literature.

[223] Philip Khoury divided the 20th century leadership of Damascus into two distinct tiers: 12 families that were at the peak of society, the most elite with the greatest wealth, and a group of among fifty families that still retained influence. Yet it was the latter group that was among the more active in more popular nationalist movements. See *Urban Notables,* 44-45.

'politics of the urban notables.'[224] The Sayyeda Zaynab emerged out of a negotiated process, and this chapter argues for the instrumentality of the shrine,[225] looking its narrative, financial, and structural development and the national and international events that it influenced and was influenced by.

Historical Origins and Memory: Sayyeda Zaynab and *ahl* al-Murtadha

Some 700 years after the events of Karbala and the tragic death of Zaynab, a *waqf* was established for a humble gravesite purportedly holding her remains by a Shi'a landowner in a small agricultural village outside Damascus. In 1366, Syed Husayn bin Musa al-Mūsavi al-Murtadha, *mufti* of the city of Baalbek, assigned all the properties he owned in Ghawta to a *waqf* in the name of Husayn ibn 'Ali and his beloved sister Zaynab, designating his family as caretakers in perpetuity. The land purportedly held the grave of Sayyeda Zaynab, and while it had been a well-respected grave, al-Mūsavi wanted to ensure that it would remain a sacred space. In the presence of prominent Shi'a *ulama*, al-Mūsavi noted the designation to be *waqf* was forever and described in great detail the extent of the boundaries. It included all his "gardens and lands located in the village of Rāwiyah" including both in the east and west, with its "orchards of fruits,

[224] Josh Landis, "Nationalism and the Politics of Za'ama': The Collapse of Republican Syria, 1945-1949," (Ph.D dissertation, Princeton University, 1997). While Landis' work is deeply intellectually indebted to Hourani's, he acknowledges that a straightforward correlation between urban leadership and power did not exist in Syria. Rather, religious and political leaders used multiple means of persuasion and negotiation to exert influence.

[225] The focus on instrumentality comes from Gershoni's and Jankowski's work on nationalism, which argued away from a strictly ideological understanding of nationalism and instead focused on its instrumental use. See Israel Gershoni, "Rethnking the Formation of Arab Nationalism in the Middle East, 1920-1945: Old and New Narratives," in *Rethinking Nationalism in the Arab Middle East*, ed. Israel Gershoni and James P. Jankowski (New York, Columbia University Press, 1997), 1-25.

berries, and trees," "all the land that is to the east of the stream of Jadaliyya" and "west of the village of Masboura."[226] Provisions had been made to generate revenue for the upkeep of the shrine from the agricultural land, al-Mūsavi attested, and therefore "nothing can be sold from the rights of this property, no lien can be put on it, nor can it be owned or bought."[227] Few early records exist about the origins of the construction of the shrine beyond the *waqfnāma* of the shrine, which was administered as a family trust and drew local pilgrims to a site that was not much more than a wood and mud room.[228]

Yet the existence of a shrine was mentioned in numerous medieval travelogues and certain *ziyārat* literature, even before the creation of the *waqf*, a fact that would later be employed as proof of the tradition of continued visitation at the site and the wide acceptance of the shrine of Zaynab. The 12th century travel writer Abu Bakr al Hawrani (d. 1215) mentioned the shrine in his *Kitab al-ishāra ila ma'rifat al-ziyarat*, as did the geographer Ibn Jubayr (d. 1217) and the renowned explorer Ibn Battuta (d. 1369), who noted there was a *waqf* in the area that residents visited.[229] The Islamic biographer Yaqūt al-Hamawi (d. 1229) noted that the village was named Rāwiya after Sayyeda Zaynab's shrine, also known as 'Qabr al-Sitt' by Ibn Tūlūn,[230] and on certain days people visited to

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[226] Shajara al-'ā'ilah ahl al-Murtadha wa waqfnama mazār Sitt Zaynab. File 3, Majma' al-Sayyeda Zaynab li al-Ma'lūmāt wa al-Abhāth, Murtadha Family Private Papers, Sitt Zaynab, Syria.
[227] *ibid*, Shajara al-'ā'ilah ahl al-Murtadha.
[228] Muhammad Bashir Zahdi, "Maqām al-Sayyeda Zaynab al-Kubrā fi madinah al-Sayyeda Zaynab: Tarīkh 'inshiya' al-maqām wa anhār al-saqf al-qadīm." *al-Mawsim,* 1, No. 4 (1989), 173.
[229] Abu 'Abdallah Muhammad Ibn Ibrahim Ibn Battuta, *Rihlat ibn battuta* (Beirut: Dār Sādir lil-tiba'a wa al-Nashr, 1964), 99.
[230] The prolific Damascene historian Muhammad ibn Tūlūn (d. 1546) made regular *ziyārat* to shrines and tombs of famous saints in Damascus, recording many of the most notable sites of the time. His *al-Tawajjuhāt al-Sitt ilā Kaff al-Nisā 'an Qabr al-Siit* was his observation on women visiting the shrine of the Prophet's granddaughter Sayyeda Zaynab. No existing copies remain of this monograph, although it is a reference for later *ziyārat* manuals that mention a Sayyeda

perform *ziyārat*. "Zaynab the Elder," Yaqūt al Hamawi notes, "the daughter of 'Ali ibn Abī Talib….and the sister of our masters Hassan and Husayn….is buried in the village of Rāwifya, near Hujjayrā."[231] The range of literary and historical references to the shrine would become the basis for which *ziyārat* to the Sayyeda Zaynab was later justified and encouraged in the 20th century, as the fact of the continued visitation to the site enforced the sense of tradition and the alleged unchanging historicity of *ziyārat* tradition.[232] While the later innovations at the shrine were constructed and often invented as traditions, they were grounded in the long trajectory of increasing pilgrimage outlined by medieval and early modern travel writers and biographers.

In 1601, the *waqf* for the Sayyeda Zaynab shrine was registered in the now Ottoman-controlled Damascus *shari'ah* courts, with the caretakers of the al-Murtadha family receiving a *firman* affirming its terms.[233] As mandated by Syed Husayn bin Musa al-Mūsavi, the waqf had remained in the custody of the al-Murtadha family through generations, with the caretaker role in shrine management enhanced by their religious lineage. The family traced its descent to the seventh Shi'a Imam, Musa al-Kādhim, as indicated on the original *waqf*, and thus their religious mandate was enhanced by their role as *sharifs* and their duty to the Prophet's family.[234] With the *waqf* registered under Ottoman authority and approved in perpetuity, the Murtadha family dictated the shrine's

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Zaynab shrine in Damascus. See also Josef W. Meri, *The Cult of Saints among Muslims and Jews in Medieval Syria* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 153.

[231] Yaqūt ibn Hamawi, *Kitāb mu'jam al-buldān*, ed. F. Wūstenfeld (Tehran: 6 vols, 1965), 2:210.

[232] These textual citations would also play a critical role in narratives and justification for the Sayyeda Zaynab shrine in the 20th century, as outlined in Chapter One.

[233] Naksh al-firmān al Uthmānī/naksh tapu defteri no. 393:149. Copy of waqf documentation, Majma' al-Sayyeda Zaynab li al-Ma'lūmāt wa al-Abhāth, Murtadha Family Private Papers, Sitt Zaynab, Syria.

[234] *Shajara al-'ā'ilah ahl al-Murtadha,* Murtadha Family Private Papers. The *sharif* title has commonly been used as an honorific for those who trace their descent to the prophet Muhammad.

affairs, the male heads of family handing down the role of *mutawalli*, or caretaker, in hereditary descent and operating largely autonomously from the political authorities. Despite bequeathing substantial portions of land to the *waqf*, the Murtadha family would also grow in wealth, establishing itself as significant landowners in the region. By the mid-19th century, they were a well-established Damascene family, gaining stature from its agricultural rents and the moral capital of its affiliation with Sayyeda Zaynab's gravesite. They would come to embody the influence and horizontal linkages that defined the notable families of the late Ottoman Empire, especially in the Syrian provinces, drawing from their social, religious, and economic status – often derived from a base of support in rural areas – to pressure the politics of the city. Indeed, according to historian Moshe Ma'oz, the influence of local politics and authority increased in the Syrian provinces in the 19th century as a consequence of the Ottoman *tanzimat* reforms, with many issues in the social and economic spheres left to local councils formed by influential elites to negotiate.[235] These local councils conversely increased the influence of the *ulama* and

[235] The *tanzimat* era, traditionally seen as lasting from 1839-1878, marks a period of social and political reforms undertaken by the Ottoman Porte to reorganize and reform the empire. It was as a wide-ranging attempt to modernize and an effort at quelling unrest in a multiethnic and religiously diverse empire, driven by an imperial elite educated in new schools and military institutions. Yet the period also saw a rise in religious and ethnic conflict and of different ideological movements, including the Young Ottoman movement, with forces such as industrialization, foreign imperialism, and nationalism making significant impact. For more, see Serif Mardin, "Tanzimat" in *The Encyclopedia of Islam and Politics* ed. Emad El-Din Shahin (Oxford: Oxford University Press online), accessed Aug. 1, 2014; Kemal Kerpat, *The Politicization of Islam: Reconstructing Identity, State, Faith, and Community in the Late Ottoman State* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001). Yet recent scholarship has also revealed the dynamism and autonomy of the period, moving away from a central, top-down narrative that focused only on the dictates of the imperial decrees and into the ways these reforms were negotiated on the ground in the provinces. These local councils, for example, galvanized local elites to find ways to protect their interests in the face of new reforms and capitalize on new opportunities presented by more autonomy; in turn, other local players on the scene, including the Ottoman governor, were able to articulate their own interests as well. See Elizabeth Thompson,

a'yān (notables) in a time of supposed modernization and reform, as they "almost perpetually used their official status to reinforce their political position and to further their private interests."[236] The alliance between *ulama* and the *a'yān* that would characterize the politics of personal leadership and dictated the early efforts to expand the shrine were rooted in these developments.

In 1840, Syed Musa Murtadha began the construction of a small new shrine on the surrounding land to the grave. The withdrawal of Egyptian troops from the Syrian provinces had made the political conditions more permissible for such construction and, more critically, allowed the resumption of pilgrimage caravans that traditionally flowed through Damascus on the way to hajj. The room was unimposing – 6 meters high and a diameter of 26 meters, with walls that were 10 centimeters thick of brick, a wooden roof that just rested on the walls, and a small dome lightly polished with smattering of gold leaf.[237] Nevertheless, enough pilgrims from surrounding areas and from the hajj caravans were stopping at the site to necessitate more consideration. That roof, however, collapsed in 1870 due to torrential rains, with the previous construction built on agricultural land that was at constant risk for flooding. The building had lacked basic necessities, and it had not met the need of pilgrims that had visited the shrine. Thus, the subsequent *mutawalli*, Syed Salim Murtadha, commissioned a new, more stable construction with financial support of wealthy traders and a grant from the treasury of the Ottoman sultan,

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"Ottoman Political Reform in the Provinces: The Damascus Advisory Council in 1844-45," *International Journal of Middle East Studies,* Vol. 25, No. 3 (Aug. 1993), 457-475.

[236] Moshe Maoz, "Syrian Urban Politics in the Tanzimat Period between 1840 and 1861," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London*, Vol. 29, No. 2, (1966), 283

[237] Zahdi, "Maqām al-Sayyeda Zaynab al-Kubra."

Abdul Aziz.[238] Syed Salim himself was educated in the Shi'a *fiqh* at one of the few Shi'a schools in Damascus, established by Syed 'Ali Mahmūd al-Amīn, the cousin of the great Shi'a *marja'* Muhsin al-Amīn and part of the prominent Shi'a network of Jabal Amil. From the death of Syed Salim in 1903, the Murtadha family would have two caretakers guiding the administration of the shrine through the decline of the Ottoman Empire and the tumultuous period preceding Syrian independence, with the demands increasing and their engagement in a range of political activities.[239] As men whose lives straddled the Ottoman era, world war and Mandate politics, and the independence movements, they embodied the intersecting alliances and transformations that would be reflected on the shrine. They were promoting the shrine to a Shi'a female saint that was growing in transnational prominence, even as they grappled with its national resonance and its international appeals. Syed Abbas Murtadha (d. 1946) would take the mandate in 1903 and would be the primary caretaker in a time of constant upheaval, serving as an elder statesman of sorts as others in the family engaged in political activism and religious campaigns to expand the shrine. During his tenure as *mutawalli,* six chambers were constructed to house pilgrims who required overnight stays;[240] among other construction, it was an indication that more pilgrims were arriving from afar and requiring accommodations for longer visits, rather than the shrine remaining a purely local site of worship.

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[238] Syed Radha Murtadha, "Tarikh al-banā' fī maqām al-Sayyeda Zaynab 'alayhi al-salām." Unpublished written manuscript. Majma' al-Sayyeda Zaynab li al-Ma'lūmāt wa al-Abhāth, Murtadha Family Private Papers, Sitt Zaynab, Syria.
[239] See Appendix for a list of *mutawalli* caretakers at the Sayyeda Zaynab.
[240] Radha Murtadha, "Tarikh al-banā' fī maqām al-Sayyeda Zaynab."

The End of Empire: Accommodation and Conflict in Mandate Politics

At the turn of the 20th century, the caretakers of the Murtadha family embodied the in-betweenness of the Syrian notable class, who "had grown wealthy in the 19th century on tax-farming, land rents, and agriculture," notes historian Keith Watenpaugh, "yet still sent their sons to be educated as Ottomans to serve the expanding imperial bureaucracy and their families' interests therein."[241] In the space of a few years, they would find themselves at the forefront of the nationalist movement, fighting French occupation after the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire. The power of the traditional elite families, according to Philip Khoury, stemmed from relations of personal dependence that they had developed, cutting both horizontally and vertically through social strata.[242] Yet the Murtadha family also transcended the divide between the politics of the notables and of the middle or lower classes because of their day-to-day engagement with the shrine, a religious mandate that carried significant weight and was unusual amongst the largely secular and Sunni elite involved in the struggle for Syrian independence. The shrine also provide a space where the alliance between '*ulama* and the *a'yān* and the process of the institutionalization of Shi'ism in the Mandate era would play out.[243] As fragmented as the sources on the shrine are, with much documentation focused on the top-down efforts to expand the shrine, the intersecting efforts of the Murtadha family and

[241] Keith Watenpaugh, "Middle-Class Modernity and the Persistence of the Politics of Notables in Inter-War Syria," *International Journal of Middle East Studies,* Vol 35, No. 2 (May 2003), 263.
[242] Philip Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate: The Politics of Arab Nationalism, 1920-1945* (London: I.B Tauris, 1987), 13.
[243] James Gelvin in particular discussed the existence of "overlapping and often interrelated networks of merchants, merchant 'ulama, and 'ulama," in Damascus and the associational bonds that connected religious and political influence remained. See *Divided Loyalties: Nationalism and Mass Politics in Syria at the Close of Empire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 115.

religious leaders such as Muhsin al-Amīn in the Mandate era to advance the shrine reveal the contours of the Shi'a community slowly expanding its importance in Syria.

Through Arrêté No° 3503, issued on January 27, 1926, the Mandate authorities had officially recognized the Shi'a Ja`fari *madhhab*, or Islamic school of jurisprudence, in the State of Greater Lebanon, where a significant Shi'a population existed. The Ja'fari courts would adjudicate personal status questions – marriage, divorce, *waqf* properties, and family issues.[244] The same was not applied to Syria, where the Twelver Shi'a community was substantially smaller and officially sanctioned documentation over *waqf* properties was limited. The Sayyeda Zaynab, however, was an established site, one that had a constructed narrative and recorded tradition. It became a site of focus where autonomous efforts could yield results, spurred by Muhsin al-Amīn, the most important Shi'a figure in the region. Al-Amīn's reformist efforts, in particular his stance against blood-letting and self-flagellation, and attempts to organize and advance the Shi'a community of Damascus have been extensively detailed by historians, especially Max Weiss and Sabrina Mervin.[245] As the main spiritual leader and *marja'* of the community, al-Amīn had a distinct engagement with production of notions of tradition and modernity. As with his portrayal of Sayyeda Zaynab, his reformist positions often melded with an argument for authenticity and tradition, coupled with an acute understanding of the way

[244] Elizabeth Thompson in particular has discussed how these courts became part of a gendered colonial structure that allowed male political elites to retain patrimonial control of an increasingly changing society. See *Colonial Citizens*.

[245] Weiss details the debates that emerged over Ashura rituals amongst Shi'a religious leaders and 'ulama over the acceptable range of practices for mourning rituals and the ways these ideologies intersect with concern over the colonial regime. See "The Modernity of Shi'i Tradition" in *In the Shadow of Sectarianism*. For more on the intellectual debates amongst Shi'a scholars on these topics, see also Sabrina Mervin, *Un réformisme chiite: Ulémas et letters du Gabal 'Amil, actuel Liban-Sud, de la fin de l'Empire ottoman à l'indépendance du Liban* (Paris: Karthala, 2000).

the Shi'a community engaged with colonial authorities and the Sunni majority.[246] Al-Amīn had argued for greater autonomy for the Shi'a of Damascus in the control of *waqf* properties and sought to use the Ja'fari courts in Lebanon to his advantage;[247] his encouragement had led Syed Radha ibn Syed Salim Murtadha to attempt to register his role as *mutawalli* in the Lebanese Ja'fari courts after the death of his father (Syed Salim Murtadha). Indeed, as in many colonial structures, local elites had attempted to use the variances in colonial administration to their advantage, coopting the laws to create openings to advance their own interests.[248]

On August 16, 1933 Muhsin al-Amīn issued a *fatwa*, or a legal-theological opinion, at the request of the current *mutawalli* of the Sayyeda Zaynab shrine, Syed Abbas Murtadha and his nephew Syed Mahdi ibn Syed Radha Murtadha.[249] The shrine of the most revered Sayyeda Zaynab, al-Amīn noted, was a unique shrine, "the only holy Shi'a shrine in the region of Damascus…an eternal sign in this area of the *Ahl al-Bayt*. For Shi'a pilgrims, there is no purpose in this region for *ziyārat* but for the resting place of Sayyeda Zaynab." He observed further, "From ancient times the most respectable *ahl*-al-Murtadha al-Mūsavi have cared for this holy grave," but now Syed Abbas Murtadha had become quite aged. The shrine was in need of construction to keep it up-to-date and accessible for all the pilgrims who desired its blessings, al-Amīn agreed, and as such he would accept the responsibility to aid Syed Abbas in these endeavors. Syed Abbas

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[246] Indeed, al-Amīn's opposition to *latam,* the letting of blood, and self-flagellation was drawn from a concern with 'purifying' the body and also purging tradition from inauthentic forms of practice. See Mervin, *Un réformisme chiite,* 160-179.
[247] Weiss, *In the Shadow of Sectarianism,* 138.
[248] Radha Murtadha, "Tarikh al-banā' fī maqām al-Sayyeda Zaynab."
[249] Syed Abbas Murtadha was the elder *mutawalli*. Syed Mahdi was his nephew, the son of his brother, Syed Radha.

Murtadha had also delegated his son, Syed Muhsin, to lead the fundraising efforts, as his sickness and advanced aged prevented him from the rigorous effort that was needed. "In spite of the fact that this is a shrine visited by both the Sunni and Shi'a believers in Damascus, it is in need of much work, especially to manage the extreme cold or heat," he noted. As such, the work undertaken by the shrine's caretakers to build rooms for greater comfort and expand the shrine was a great service for all Muslims. So, al-Amīn professed, "May god help those who are aiding in these efforts…for Allah does not allow these good deeds remain unrewarded."[250] Al-Amīn's support for the shrine was solicited by the Murtadha family, yet it allowed him to make an argument consistent with his ideological positions. The shrine was an important part of the region's Islamic heritage, according to al-Amīn, and visited by Sunni and Shi'a alike, an emphasis in line with what Tamara Chalabi calls his "pro-Arab nationalist conception" in which Shi'ism "was no longer confrontational or incompatible with the Lebanese (Sunni) mainstream."[251] Al-Amīn's concern with the acceptance and advancement of the Shi'a community led to a deliberate positioning of the shrine as a space that was both a unique and critical site for Shi'a exceptionalism and also one that transcended sectarian divides. According to al-Amīn, the shrine had a long 'eternal' history and had been properly managed by the Shi'a Murtadha family. Yet in response to the increasing presence of pilgrims and a more engaged Shi'a population, attempts to modernize and renovate the shrine had to be made to continue the tradition of pilgrimage.

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[250] Fatwa min Syed Mushin Amīn al 'Amili lil Syed Abbas bin Syed Salīm Murtadha, 24 rabi' al-thāni, 1352. Letter from Muhsin al-Amīn to Syed Abbas Murtadha, August 16, 1933, File 4, Majma' al-Sayyeda Zaynab li al-Ma'lūmāt wa al-Abhāth, Murtadha Family Private Papers, Sitt Zaynab, Syria.

[251] Tamara Chalabi, *The Shi'is of Jabal 'Amil and the New Lebanon: Community and Nation State* (New York: Palgrave McMillan, 2006), 147.

The Murtadha *mutawalli*, Syed Abbas and his son Syed Muhsin in particular, also simultaneously sought support for their mandate and the modernization of the shrine from other traditional sources of religious authority – the Shi'a clerics of Jabal Amil and the noted families of the Shi'a *ulama* networks of the region.[252] While Muhsin al-Amīn was the most respected Shi'a leader in Damascus, the Murtadha family also simultaneously appealed to his main rival in the region, Syed 'Abd al-Husayn Sharaf al-Dīn, the preeminent *marja'* in the Mandate province of Greater Lebanon. Sharaf al-Dīn opposed many of al-Amīn's attempts at reform, and was often perceived to have a more cordial relationship with the French colonial state.[253] Yet he retained significant influence amongst the larger population of Shi'a in Jabal Amil, and his support for the shrine was critical. In a letter of opinion written to Syed Abbas and his son Syed Muhsin, Sharaf al-Dīn argued first for the centrality of the shrines to the *Ahl al-Bayt* and the importance of visitation to these shrines, a position consistent with his own attempts to preserve 'tradition' from al-Amīn's reforms and the promotion of a strong sectarian unity. "For [those] that respect the signs of Allah…[they] become a source of purification for the soul," Sharaf al-Dīn noted. The *Ahl al-Bayt* were commonly referred to as the 'signs'

[252] The families of Jabal Amil had a long history of producing influential Shi'a scholars, which have historically been seen as forming the critical class of ulama during the Safavid Empire, the most notable of whom was Shaykh Karakī (d. 1534). See Rula Jurdi Abisaab, *Converting Persia: Religion and Power in the Safavid Empire* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004) and "The 'ulama of Jabal 'Amil in Safavid Iran, 1501-1736: Marginality, Migration, and Social Change," *Iranian Studies*, Vol. 27, No. 1-4 (1994), 103-122. Yet as a fairly marginalized and economically undeveloped community, the Shi'a of Jabal Amil would not truly coalesce into a political force until the time of Musa al-Sadr. The ties between Najaf, Jabal Amil, and Safavid Iran were complex, resulting in the intermarriage amongst many of the most powerful ulama families through the 19th century, including the al-Sadr, al- Amīm, and Sharaf al-Din families.

[253] Both men, however, turned down the role of the head of the Ja'fari courts, established by the French. Yet Sharaf al-Dīn was driven in part by his desire to build a more cohesive and strong Shiite community, and saw good minority relations with the French in the administrative territory of Greater Lebanon as a part of that process. See Weiss, 138-141.

from Allah, and thus Sharaf al-Dīn's letter refers to both their persons and their holy gravesites. About the work undertaken on the shrine and the attempts to bring it to the required standards, he declared, "Our need is great for this noble act. May Blessings be sent upon those who raise the minarets of the *Ahl-al-Bayt*, especially in the capital of Banu-Ummayah."[254] The shrine would be new, but the tradition was old, as was the history that Sharaf al-Dīn evoked of Zaynab alone in the Umayyad court. The new shrine would similarly be an assertive statement of the minority Shi'a community.

The attention to the Sayyeda Zaynab was not limited to local religious and shrine leaders, however. Even before Muhsin al-Amīn's engagement with the site, the shrine had been receiving donations from distant Shi'a communities, illustrating a growing transnational network of patronage and devotional practice. In 1930, Shams al-Muluk, the wife of Aga Khan II and the niece of Muhammad Ali Shah of the Qajar dynasty, made a personal donation "for the beautification [of the shrine] and work of inlaid tiles in the floor of the holy grave."[255] The patronage for Shi'a shrines was not uncommon among royal courts and those that deemed themselves descendants of Muhammad, as the political and religious legitimization these acts drew remained potent. Notably, however, the choice of the Sayyeda Zaynab shrine for a personal donation from the Aga Khan's wife spoke to the increasing prominence of the shrine and the growing gendered dynamic – while the Iraqi and Irani shrines had been funded by patronage of the male dynastic

[254] Bayān 'Abd al-Husayn Sharaf al-Dīn al-Mūsavi, 25 rabi' al-thāni, 1352. Letter from Sharaf al-Dīn to Syed Abbas and Syed Muhsin Murtadha, August 17, 1933, File 4, Majma' al-Sayyeda Zaynab li al-Ma'lūmāt wa al-Abhāth, Murtadha Family Private Papers, Sitt Zaynab, Syria.
[255] "Aqilah Bani Hashim ki roza: ziyārat, ma'lumāt, aur tafsīr." *Al-Asad*, July 13, 1936. The Agha Khan was the head of the Ismaili sect, a branch of Shi'ism whose adherents trace a different line of descent following the seventh Imam, and that titular title was passed on through hereditary descent. Shams al-Muluk was also the granddaughter of the Fat'h Ali Shah Qajar.

leaders and religious classes that had set up residence in the shrine cities, the Sayyeda Zaynab shrine benefitted equally by individual and community donations by women and families who sought to leave their mark on an expanding site.[256] In 1935, a group of women from Lahore calling themselves *Binät 'Ali*, or daughters of 'Ali, began collecting money to make a "a special donation of water taps in the name of our Lady, the mother of all sorrows." It was hoped that the donation would incur favor with Zaynab on the Day of Judgment, and she would intercede on their and their families' behalf. Through their donation to her shrine, "our names will be amongst the most celebrated," they hoped.[257] While little documentation exists of the final donation, the incident reveals the resonance that both Zaynab and her shrine had in Shi'a consciousness, even before the rise in political sectarianism and organization in the post-independence era. For these women, Zaynab was an intercessory figure, whose shrine appealed to them on a community level in their hopes to gain blessings for them and their families. Donation to the shrines of the *Ahl al-Bayt* in exchange for blessings and worldly regard had a long tradition through the 19th centuries, as highlighted by Juan Cole and Yithak Nakash. The choice of water taps was particularly salient for the Sayyeda Zaynab, as water was cut off for three days before the 10th of Muharram at Ashura, and her brother Abbas ibn 'Ali was slain in his attempts to retrieve water for the young children of the camp. It was narrated in traditions that till the end of their lives, the survivors of Karbala could not look at water without

[256] In the same period, the old dome of the shrine was repaired, new pledges were made for more rooms by the family of Muhammad Ali Nizam and his children, and individuals undertook repairs in return for their names dedicated and memorialized at the Sayyeda Zaynab. See Radha Murtadha, "Tarikh al-banā' fī maqām al-Sayyeda Zaynab."
[257] "Aqilah Bani Hashim ki roza," *Al-Mu'mineen*, July 13, 1936.

great sorrow.[258] Yet it also melded a decidedly profane and modern concern, as the Sayyeda Zaynab did not "possess the healthy facilities for her many believers."[259]

While individual and community donations were bolstering the shrine, often given through a personal affiliation with Zaynab as a female saint, the efforts of the Murtadha family would demonstrate the responsiveness and connectedness of the Shi'a transnational network in the mid-20th century, even as rhetoric focused in the importance of the shrine in a broader Islamic history. Due to his failing health, Syed Abbas Murtadha would authorize his son to act in his stead and travel to the main centers of Shi'a thought to raise the matter of the shrine. He counseled Syed Muhsin that it must be known "amongst all the wealthy of our region and the devotees to the *Ahl al-Bayt* that although [the shrine] is not within reach of many of her followers, it is the center for all Shi'a faithful and pilgrims…and the center for those who love [Zaynab]." Because of his failing health, he noted that he had no choice but to appoint his son as a *mutawalli* of the shrine, as "with the help of Allah we undertake this mission with full force, and we beseech Allah for our success. We ask of scholars, *marāji'* and protectors of the *shari'ah* to turn peoples' attentions to this worthy project…and issue opinions on the importance of this effort."[260] Armed with the authorizations and *fatwa*, Syed Muhsin Murtadha

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[258] Multiple *hadith* mention the centrality of water as a trope before and after Karbala, many of them compiled in the substantial *Bihār al-Anwār,* the most comprehensive Shi'a source on traditions and narratives, compiled by the renowned 17th century scholar Mulla Muhammad Baqir, known more commonly as 'Allama al-Majlisi. Al-Majilisi has recounted hundreds of *hadith* on the suffering and aftermath of Karbala. In one such example, Imam Zayn al-Abidīn was unable to drink any water without weeping. See Muhammad Bāqir al-Majlisi, *Bihar al-Anwār,* vol. 46 (Qom: Ansariyan Publications 1979), 108.

[259] "Aqilah Bani Hashim ki roza," *Al-Mu'mineen*, July 13, 1936.

[260] Letter From Syed Abbas Murtadha to Sayyid Mushin, April 12, 1933, File 4, Majma' al-Sayyeda Zaynab li al-Ma'lūmāt wa al-Abhāth, Murtadha Family Private Papers, Sitt Zaynab, Syria.

traveled to Iran in 1933, accompanied briefly by Muhsin al-Amīn, where he remained for six months to promote the importance of the shrine for Shi'a Muslims and the need for donations from across the Shi'a world, so that the shrine could "receive its due standing and become a masterpiece of Islamic art" and "play its role in Islamic history and humanity…and revitalize the city of Damascus, which has been the seat of culture and civilization," noted his son in a 1989 biography.[261] In Qom, Murtadha would meet the Shi'a *marja'* Shaykh Muhammad Husayn al-Na'īnī (d. 1936), who had been expelled from Najaf and Sāmarrā by British authorities after his association with Mirza Muhammad Hassan Shīrāzī, the leading figure in the 1860 tobacco protests against the British Empire[262] Na'īnī had been one of the seminal Shi'a figures in the debate over the Persian Constitutional Revolution of 1906, and his influence had remained, even with the tightening of power for the *ulama* in Pahlavi Iran. Na'īnī would authorize an Iraqi, al-Hajj Mahdi Bahbahāni, to act as his representative and collect funds from *waqf* endowments, *zakāt*, and charitable alms from his followers to use in the way of the shrine, as part of a donation in the way of Allah.[263] The Murtadha family would also

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[261] Hani Murtadha, "Hayāt Syed Mushin Murtadha: Mutawalli al-maqām al-sābiq." *al-Mawsim,* 1, No. 4 (1989), 49. In this brief biography, Hani Murtadha notes that his father "Syed Muhsin Murtadha didn't simply rely on Iranian aid. Rather, he remained busy collecting *hidāyat* [gifts] and services from all Arab and Islamic countries." This retroactive distancing from Iran and Qom is noticeable, particular at the end of the Iran-Iraq War, in which Syria was one of Iran's few Arab allies. Yet the Ba'athist regime in Syria carefully managed that alliance, mindful of the unease amongst some in Syria's minority Sunni population with the Alawite alliance with Iran's Shi'a Islamic State.

[262] See Shahrough Akhavi, *Religion and Politics in Contemporary Iran* (Albany: State University of New York, 1980), 27. For more on Na'īnī, see Abdul-Hadi Hairi, "Shi'ism and Constitutionalism: A Study of the Life and Views of Mirza Muhammad Husayn Nā'īnī," PhD dissertation, McGill University, 1973.

[263] Letter from Muhammad Husayn al-Nā'īnī to Mahdi Bahbahāni, 15 Shawwal, 1352 Hijri, January 31, 1934, File 5, Majma' al-Sayyeda Zaynab li al-Ma'lūmāt wa al-Abhāth, Murtadha Family Private Papers, Sitt Zaynab, Syria.

collect letters of witness from the most respected Shi'a *marāji'*, including Husayn Kāshif al'Ghitā' of Iraq and 'Ali Husayni al-Shīrāzī in Sāmarrā; the letters and *fatwas* were aimed at authenticating the gravesite and their honored role as caretakers, endorsing their efforts as legitimately acting in the way of Allah.[264]

The responsiveness of the *marja'* to the expansion of the Sayyeda Zaynab shrine provides a window into the practice of *being* sectarian, as Max Weiss has coined, as pilgrims were engaging with the site and voicing their concerns to figures they considered had the religious and moral authority to initiate change. Yet it also shows the world of the Shi'a *ulama* confronting a narrowing power base across the region. In Iran, the *ulama* were confronted with the modernizing social and political reforms of Reza Shah Pahlavi, many that would challenge the *ulama*'s traditional domains of power and authority. A new civil code was enacted to provide a uniform basis for the application of *shari'ah,* new laws of land and property registration and the control of administration of *waqf* land, and questions of personal status that had previously been under the purview of the *ulama* were now brought under civil control. To undermine the influence of the religious school, or *hawza*, the government established a system of modern secular schools. Most critically, the abolition of the veil and the uniform dress codes were seen as a direct assault on the religious classes.[265] In Iraq, oppositional agitation to the government was brewing, led by Kāshif al-Ghita and *ulama* in Najaf and Shi'a lawyers in

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[264] See "Shahādāt al-ulamā", File 5, including Letter from Husayn bin Mahmūd al Tabatabā'i al-Qummī to Syed Abbas Murtadha, 14 Muharram, 1352 Hijri, Majma' al-Sayyeda Zaynab li al-Ma'lūmāt wa al-Abhāth, Murtadha Family Private Papers, Sitt Zaynab, Syria.

[265] For more on the reforms of Raza Shah Pahlavi and the affect on ulama relations, see Akhavi, *Religion and Politics in Contemporary Iran*; M.H Faghfoory, "The Ulama-State Relations in Iran: 1921-1941," *International Journal of Middle East Studies,* 19 (November 1987), 413-32 and "The Impact of Modernization on the 'ulama in Iran, 1925-1941," *Iranian Studies,* Vol. 26, No. ¾ (Summer-Autumn, 1993), 277-312.

Baghdad, coupled with Shi'a tribal unrest in Rumaytha and Diwaniyya. Shi'a protests and revolts had exploded in 1927 and 1932, with calls for participation in government, parliament, and a civil service that had disproportionately excluded them, as well as the inclusion of Shi'a jurisprudence in law school, the control of *waqf* revenues, and other demands.[266] The efforts to expand the Sayyeda Zaynab in Syria were supported by a transnational network of Shi'a leaders who were themselves faced with a narrowing range of political possibilities from new secular national leaders. Despite the transnational nature of Shi'a ideology, by and large these *ulama* were occupied with very specific sets of national concerns, many of them tacitly working within and accepting the confines of the national construct. Yet their support of the Syrian efforts to promote the Sayyeda Zaynab was an affirmation of assertive attempts to articulate new Shi'a spaces and practice, an example of an active engagement with the production of Shi'a transnationalism. By lending their name and authorizing the use of religious donations from Shi'as internationally towards the shrine, the *ulama* of Iran and Iraq authenticated acts of 'being sectarian' among devotees. Certainly, individuals and communities had been donating to the shrine as a means of linking themselves to Zaynab bint 'Ali. The authentication of *ulama* sanctioned these donations as in line with Shi'a jurisprudence and tradition and transformed them into acts of being sectarian. Indeed, the Murtadha family's efforts to secure religious sanction for the shrine and their custodianship can be read as an affirmation of the still-powerful role that the opinions of the *marja'* played in daily religious activity of Shi'as, even as political power was curtailed by new regimes.

[266] See Yizhak Nakash, "The Search for Representation" in *The Shi'is of Iraq*, 109-132 and Elie Kedourie, "Anti-Shi'ism in Iraq under the Monarchy," *Middle Eastern Studies,* Vol. 24, No. 2 (April, 1988), 249-253.

In Syria, al-Amīn's preoccupation with how the Shi'a minority was perceived by colonial authorities and the Sunni majority led to an emphasis on the Islamic and regional importance of the shrine, mediating a conciliatory relationship with demands for more autonomy.[267] Yet even among the Murtadha family, a less accommodationist stance existed, providing a microcosm of the myriad ways of Shi'as participated in the public arena. Syed Mahdi bin Radha Murtadha, one of the shrine's two *mutawallis,* was a prominent member of the National Bloc (*al-Kutlah al-Wataniyah*) party, the political party leading the push for Syrian independence and led by notables among the Sunni elite of Syria. Nakash has noted that many young Shi'as joined socialist and Arab nationalist parties in the years between the wars, yet Mahdi Murtadha's prominence brought many of Syria's great nationalist figures into contact with the shrine. Educated in both Arabic and Turkish, as many of the sons of notables families were at the turn of the century, Mahdi Murtadha was deeply involved in the politics of colonial resistance as the administrator of its central offices and the organizational link between the leaders of *al-Kutlah* and the local leaders and landowners around Damascus. In January 1936, after the French authorities closed their offices in Damascus and Aleppo, the National Bloc called for a general strike that lasted 50 days and grounded Mandate Syria to a halt.[268] From his capacity in the resistance, Murtadha led demonstrations and a boycott against the Belgian company that had been awarded a monopoly on electricity in Damascus and had

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[267] In March 1939, al-Amīn sent a letter to Gennardi, the French Inspector General of the Controle de Wakfs, rejecting attempts by the state to curtail religious authority and noting the increase in the "revolution of spirit" amongst Shi'a Muslims. See Weiss, *In the Shadow of Sectarianism,* 111. Yet the dual attitude is reflected in the most prominent Shi'a newspaper in Greater Lebanon, *al-'Irfān*, which took pains to note the joint attendance of Sunnis and Shi'a in commemorative rituals. See *al-'Irfan* Vol. 30, No. 1-2 (Feb-Mar 1940), 156.

[268] "Fresh Riots Occur in Syria and Egypt," *The New York Times,* Jan. 28, 1936.

continually raised prices.[269] The crippling pressure of the national strike led the Mandate officials to relent in March, negotiating the Franco-Syrian Treaty of Independence, which the French ultimately did not ratify. Yet the opposition to the French intensified; Mahdi Murtadha's increasing involvement in *al-Kutlah* and his associations with the leading nationalist figures of the time – Shukri al-Quwatli, Jamil Mardam Bey, Sa'adallah al-Jabiri, and Sabri al-Asali – made his duties as the second *mutawalli* of the Sayyeda Zaynab difficult. Syed Abbas Murtadha, the elder remaining *mutawalli* at the shrine, remained in deep support of Mahdi Murtadha's activities, writing to his nephew that he understood the importance of "the future of the nation."[270] On March 21st, 1939, Mahdi Murtadha was arrested by French colonial forces, transferred from Tadmor Prison to Sijn (or prison) Ramal in Beirut, and finally ended up in room number five in Sijn al-Qi'lah in Damascus, where he was housed with Mahmud al-Bayruti, the head of the Nationalist Youth party, and Sayf al-Dīn al-Ma'mūn, one of the leaders of *al-Kutlah*.[271]

[269] Radha Murtadha, "Syed Mahdi Murtadha: lamha 'an hayātuhu," *al-Mawsim,* 1, No. 4 (1989), 41.
[270] Letter from Syed Abbas Murtadha to Syed Mahdi Murtadha, 12 April 1938, in Radha Murtadha, "Syed Mahdi Murtadha," 42.
[271] Nahed Murtadha, in discussion with the author, Feb. 8, 2013.

(Figure 3.2: Mahdi Murtadha, R, with Mahmud al-Bayrūti and Sayf al-Dīn al Ma'mūn outside prison)

Historiography of the nationalist elite in Syria has traditionally outlined the centrality of the Sunni urban elite. According to Watenpaugh, "by making Sunni Islam a key dimension of political legitimacy, "extra-textual" Muslims – members of Sufi brotherhoods, in particular, and more important, those of Syria's heterogeneous Muslim sects, the Ismailis, Druze, and the current masters of Syria, the Alawites-were marginalized and often driven to less liberal alternatives and more radical Pan-Arabist ideologies to annul this marginality."[272] Yet Murtadha's centrality to *al-Kutlah* provides a

[272] Watenpaugh, Middle-Class Modernity and the Persistence of the Politics of Notables in Inter-War Syria, 278.

different look into the range of ways of being Shi'a in Mandate Syria, occupying a range of options between accommodation and conflict, distinct from al-Amīn's reformism and the Alawī debates between exclusionary and integrationist acceptance.[273] Through multiple incarcerations, his involvement with the most prominent members of the opposition deepened.[274] While he remained involved with shrine affairs, heading the drive to pave the roads leading up to the Sayyeda Zaynab for easier access to pilgrims, the Murtadha family emphasized that the nationalist opposition to France was critical, beyond their work to expand the shrine for Shi'a faithful that often worked within the construct of the colonial system. In a letter to Mahdi Murtadha after another release from prison, his cousin Toufiq Murtadha penned him a letter, writing, "I learned recently that you have been released from French custody, by the grace of God. We are grateful for your high spirits and have no doubt that your selfless efforts for the people will be

[273] The Alawī dominated province of Latakia had been awarded autonomous rule multiple times during the French Mandate, including after a revolt led by the Alawī shaykh Saleh al-'Ali in 1919-21; yet in 1936 the French annexation of Latakia to the Syrian state was met support in the province, with the hopes that this would lead to more political influence from French officials. Centuries of *fatāwā* declaring them non-Muslims had led to poor conditions amongst the Alawīs, documented by the Revered Samuel Lyde, who called life for Nusayris as "a perfect hell on earth." See Samuel Lyde, *The Asian Mystery Illustrated in the History, Religion and Present State of the Ansaireeh or Nusairis of Syria* (London: Longman, Green, Longman, and Roberts, 1860), 222. https://archive.org/stream/asianmysteryill00lydegoog#page/n8/mode/2up
To counter anti-Alawī sentiment that was the result of centuries of *fatwa* issued declaring them non-Muslims, the *mufti* of Palestine, Hajj al-Amīn al-Husayn issued a fatwa declaring them Muslims and should be accepted as Muslims. *Al-Sha'b,* Damascus, 31 July, 1936. The search for authenticity in Jerusalem reveals a likely resistance amongst Sunni and Shi'a clerics within Syria to authenticate this integration.

[274] *Sūrah ba'dh al-ma'taqilīn al-watanīn min qabl al-sultah al-fransīyah fi qil'ah Dimashq*. Syed Mahdi with nationalist activisits in front the French jail in 1940, Photograph, File 1, Majma' al-Sayyeda Zaynab li al-Ma'lūmāt wa al-Abhāth, Murtadha Family Private Papers, Sitt Zaynab, Syria. Mahdi al-Murtadha is pictured with some of his closest associates, including Sayf al-Din al-Ma'mun and Mahmūd al-Bayruti. [Figure 3.2]

rewarded."[275] His funeral in October 1945 at the Sayyeda Zaynab brought together the various religious, national, and local forces that had shaped Shi'a public engagement and the milieu in which the shrine operated. The ceremonies were attended by Muhsin al-Amīn, many activists from the National Bloc and National Youth, the Murtadha family, and Shi'a associates from Shurafa'; in addition to the range of dignitaries present for the funeral, Mahdi Murtadha was eulogized by Fares al-Khoury, Syria's Christian Prime Minister and a staunch secular nationalist.[276] The figures assembled in the space of the Sayyeda Zaynab captured a moment of dynamic changes, both for the nation and the shrine. With the death of Abbas Murtadha in the same year and the final French troops withdrawn from Syria in April 1946, the intricacies of managing the shrine in the Mandate would come to a close. Yet the break between colonial and national was fluid, as many of the prominent personalities would remain the same and the structures of authority cultivated during Mandate rule would endure. Nevertheless, the emergence of new states frameworks would alter engagement with the Sayyeda Zaynab shrine. The turbulence of the independence era would bring both challenges and renewed opportunities in the promotion of the Sayyeda Zaynab and the Shi'a community of Syria.

A National Shrine in Transnational Space

The euphoria and grand celebrations that accompanied the last withdrawal of French troops on Evacuation Day, April 17, 1946 would quickly give way to a period of

[275] Letter from Doctor Toufiq al Murtadha to Mahdi Murtadha, January 17, 1940. File 6, Majma' al-Sayyeda Zaynab li al-Ma'lūmāt wa al-Abhāth, Murtadha Family Private Papers, Sitt Zaynab, Syria.
[276] *Janāzah al-Syed Mahdi Murtadha al-Mūsavi*, October 17, 1945. Photograph, File 1. Majma' al-Sayyeda Zaynab li al-Ma'lūmāt wa al-Abhāth, Murtadha Family Private Papers, Sitt Zaynab, Syria.

great turbulence that exacerbated "the bitter divisions which plagued Syrian society," noted Josh Landis, and "could not be erased through the manipulation of Syria's national history and symbols."[277] Despite the symbolic presence of many religious and political leaders at the parade along with President Shukri al-Quwatli, including Shi'a notables, discontent with the national government would quickly reemerge. Syria would participate in the first Arab-Israeli War in 1948, which brought about the creation of the state of Israel and a wave of predominantly Sunni Palestinian refugees settling in the outskirts of the Sayyeda Zaynab.[278] A succession of new parliaments and coups would destabilize the political regime, with four new constitutions drafted and discarded. Yet it was also the age of an assertive and secular Arab nationalism, most embodied by the union of Syria and Egypt into the United Arab Republic from 1958-1961. Reflecting the ideological currents of the 1950s, the promotion of the shrine was couched in appeals to Arab heritage and the development of Damascus. Yet the transnational engagement with the shrine, including from Iran, from artisans, businessmen, women, and political leaders provides a unique window into multiple identities in flux. I argue that these gifts embody a way to capture 'being Shi'a' and the dynamism of identity amongst a range of classes, despite the secularizing policies of the regimes of the newly independent states.

The death of Syed Abbas and Syed Mahdi Murtadha in 1945 would usher in a dynamic new age for the shrine, led by their sons, Syed Muhsin and Syed Radha Murtadha, respectively. The latter had been sent to study engineering in France during the years of Mahdi Murtadha's incarcerations, a route that was not unusual for the sons of

[277] Landis, "Nationalism and the Politics of Za'ama," 158.
[278] Sabrina Mervin, "Sayyida Zaynab: Bainlieu de Damas ou nouvelle ville sainte chiite?" in *Cahiers d'etudes sur la Mediterranée orientale et le mode turco-iranien*, 22 (1996), 151.

nationalist leaders opposing the French Mandate. He would return after independence and take on the role as *mutawalli* with Syed Muhsin Murtadha, who had spent over a decade in the service of the shrine. Their forefathers had done good work, they noted, "in the expansion of the holy grave, even though the political and economic situation was at times difficult and material help was not available. However, with a bettering economic situation, our hard work will begin to yield rewards."[279] In 1950, together with Syed Muhsin al-Amīn, notables from the Shi'a quarters of Hayy al-Amīn, and Mahdi Bahbahāni, the Lajna' Ashrāf 'alā Maqām al-Sayyeda Zaynab was formed to design, finance, and administer the new shrine. Al-Amīn issued a *fatwa* to sanction the work of the shrine and to bear witness of his endorsement to Shi'a leaders and devotes. "It is apparent for those who are most honored to visit the grave of Sayyeda Zaynab (AS), the revered sister of our Master, Husayn ibn 'Ali, in the village of Rawiyyah that that respected place is in urgent need of repair, including the masjid that is connected to the shrine," he noted. The reconstruction would "make greater facilities for the pilgrims, reduce the congestion and discomfort, and bestow honor on *al-Shām*."[280] Al-Amīn's statement reflects sophistication in balancing Shi'a appeals, a modernist concern for the technical aspects of the shrine, and a broad appeal to its importance to the region as a whole – a carefully worded appeal consistent with al-Amīn's concern of Shi'a advancement and perception. Indeed, for al-Amīn, the significance of the shrine was that it provided a local and authentic site for honoring the *Ahl al-Bayt* and a place where piousness could be expressed.

[279] Khatah al-Jadīda lil Maqām al-Sharif al-Sayyeda Zaynab. File 12, Majma' al-Sayyeda Zaynab.
[280] Fatwa of Musin al-Amīn to the Lajna' Ashrāf 'alā Maqām al-Sayyeda Zaynab, 1370 Hijri, File 8, Majma' al-Sayyeda Zaynab li al-Ma'lūmāt wa al-Abhāth, Murtadha Family Private Papers, Sitt Zaynab, Syria.

For this "noble purpose", al-Amīn authorized the expenditure of *sahm al-Imam* on the Sayyeda Zaynab, a form of taxation incumbent on all Shi'a Muslims to spend in the way of God, the Prophet, and the Imam of their time for the propagation of the faith, including instances of *ulama* support of *jihād*.[281] The *sahm al-Imam* was historically used to help the *marja'* develop an independent financial base, often funneled through local *ulama* based outside the shrine cities that associated with the *marja'*, and often to support students and low-ranking *ulama* under their leadership. Al-Amīn's adaptation of the concept of the *sahm-e-Imam* to allow Shi'as to donate directly to the promotion of the shrine of Zaynab bint 'Ali was a modern and expansive interpretation of tradition, albeit one grounded in *hadith* and jurisprudence. Al-Amīn was well aware of the competition over resources and that this ruling was meant to position the Sayyeda Zaynab as an attractive alternative to the Iraqi and Iranian shrine cities.[282] Notably, then, it received the concurrent sanction of some of the major *marja',* in a time where the shrine cities were suffering from lack of funding and political repression. Yet for many of these *marja*' who advocated a more quietist stance, including the revered Najafi Ayatollah Muhsin al-Hakīm, promoting the Sayyeda Zaynab provided an alternative way to engage a

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[281] Ja'fari jurisprudence required the payment or taxation of *khums*, in addition to *zakat* (charitable alms), primarily on profit and business earnings. During the occultation of the Imam, *khums* once calculated is payable to the representatives of the Hidden Imam, ie the *marja' al-taqlīd*. The *mujtahid* was to divide *khums* into two parts: the *sahm al-Imam* and the *sahm al-sadāt*, to be distributed among the descendants of the Prophet. See Abdulaziz Sachedina, "Al-Khums, The Fifth in the Imāmi Shi'i Legal System," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies,* Vol. 39, No. 4 (Oct, 1980), 275-289. In 1813, Shaykh Ja'far Kashif al-Ghitā' authorized its use at the disposal of Fath 'Ali Shah Qajar to wage war against the Russians.

[282] Al-Amīn once recalled how his father, who was visiting Najaf, was convinced by a local scholar not to continue on the Mashhad, which was in direct competition with Najaf and Karbala, and instead stay and spend his resources supporting students in Najaf. See Meir Litvak, "The Finances of the 'Ulama' Communities of Najaf and Karbala, 1796-1904." *Die Welt des Islams*, New Series, Vol. 40, Issue 1 (March 2000), 57.

transnational Shi'a appeal within the confines of new restrictions on their influence. It would also affirm – and indeed spur – the growing importance of Zaynab bint 'Ali, including her and her shrine in a practice that was historically linked to the male Imams and male-dominated *ulama* institutions. Just as narrative traditions on Zaynab's role in Shi'ism would grow after Muhsin al-Amīn's work, in practice, jurisprudential traditions confined to the Imams would be expanded to include Zaynab.

The fluidity of Shi'a jurisprudence and al-Amīn's sanction to apportion funds from mandatory giving directly to the Sayyeda Zaynab had a substantial impact on the shrine, freeing up the direct influx of donations and gifts from all over the Islamic world.[283] In the record of the committee's first meeting, the members noted, "under the leadership of the Great Mujtahid Ayatollah Muhsin al-Amīn, may God praise him" the committee called on "all those who have compassion and love of the *Ahl-al-Bayt* (AS) to assist in this mission…and send prayers and donations from all over the Islamic world for this exalted work."[284] With the approval of the shrine committee, Radha Murtadha completed a comprehensive plan for a new, expansive site, surrounded by 70 upscale rooms for pilgrims' accommodations and important occasions, built in "classical Islamic

[283] The fatwa was affirmed by a similar declaration by the revered Iraqi *'marja*, Muhsin Tabataba'ī al-Hakīm, noting "there is a necessity to re-build the masjid that is connected to the mashhad of Sayyeda Zaynab in *al-Sham*. For this, we have allowed the expenditure of *Sahm-al-Mubarik*, Sahm-Ali and his forefathers, in its construction. Rewards and Blessings from God for those who help in this cause." Letter from Muhsin Tabataba'ī al-Hakīm to Syed Muhsin al-Amīl al-Amili, 1370 Hijri, File 8, Majma' al-Sayyeda Zaynab li al-Ma'lūmāt wa al-Abhāth, Murtadha Family Private Papers, Sitt Zaynab, Syria.

[284] Statement from Nasib Murtadha, al-Hajj Mahdi Bihbahāni, Syed Muhsin Murtadha, Syed Abbas Murtadha, Syed Radha Murtadha, al-Hajj Abdullah Nahhās, 15 jami' al-awwal, 1370 Hijri (February 20, 1951), Records of Lajna' Ashrāf 'alā Maqām al-Sayyeda Zaynab, Sitt Zaynab, Syria.

style" made from the "most quality materials."[285] The international appeals would be met by substantial donations to allow the committee to move forward, essential for a country in which the Twelver Shi'a population in 1953 represented only 0.4% of the total population.[286] Despite the death of Muhsin al-Amīn the previous year, a towering presence for Syria's Shi'a population, in the same year the shrine was officially registered as a Shi'a *waqf* property when Ja'fari law was finally recognized by the Syrian state and the terms of the original *waqf* and subsequent rulings were authorized.[287] The ability to register lands and finances under *waqf* ordinances would have a significant impact as the responsiveness of Shi'a pilgrims and believers to appeals and *fatwas* yielded more donations. The Sayyeda Zaynab shrine presented a new shrine, a modern way to articulate a Shi'a affiliation in acts of giving and place a mark on a significant site of worship, removed from the traditional institutional structures of the old shrine cities. Despite the lack of religious organizations and *marja'* based at the Sayyeda Zaynab, which were the historical recipients of financial donations and dues, the support from Shi'a groups and individuals indicates the receptiveness to these appeals and the emotional connection to Zaynab herself.

The support of the Sayyeda Zaynab would also become more ornate, more aesthetically oriented, much of it donated in return for miraculous interventions from Zaynab or as personal representation of devotion to the Prophet's whole family. In 1950,

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[285] Khatah al-Jadīda lil Maqām al-Sharif al-Sayyeda Zaynab. File 12, Majma' al-Sayyeda Zaynab.
[286] Khalid Sindawi, "The Shiite Turn in Syria," *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology 8* (June 23, 2009), 101.
[287] Thomas Pierret, "Karbala in the Umayyad Mosque: Sunnite Panic at the 'Shiitization' of Syria in the 2000s," in *The Dynamics of Sunni-Shia Relationships: Doctrine, Transnationalism, Intellectuals and the Media* eds. Brigitte Maréchal and Sami Zemni (London: Hurst Publishers, 2013), 102.

Muhammad Ali Habib, the Pakistani businessman and financier, had visited the shrine of Sayyeda Zaynab to pray for her intercession. His only son and the heir to the family's banking network had been suddenly paralyzed and all the doctors at their disposal had been unable to diagnose his condition. Yet upon his return home, he found his son cured. In return for these miraculous blessings, Habib commissioned a new large *dharih*, or protective cage, to cover Zaynab's tomb, made of silver, gold, and precious jewels. Habib noted that he traveled to Damascus for he felt "sure in his heart of the mercy of the mother of all hardships. In the name of the martyrs of Karbala, for Zaynab bint 'Ali, the daughter of Fatima bint Muhammad, all things are possible and no earnest prayer is beyond her reach."[288] Habib would return to the shrine in 1954 for a ceremony with the shrine's committee installing the new *dharih*, along with many of the Karachi businessmen who had aided in its creation.[289] Such a public and grandiose religious gesture was unusual for Muhammad Ali Habib. Habib had been part of a close cadre of Shi'a associates and financiers of Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan, and the All-India Muslim League. The Habib Bank had played a critical role in gathering funds to finance the Pakistan Movement, and had moved its headquarters to Karachi after independence at Jinnah's request, providing the new Government of Pakistan a substantial line of credit in its infancy. Yet the Habib family rarely overtly discussed its Shi'a background, much like Jinnah, who rarely self-identified as Shi'a, always emphasizing instead the need for a secular and non-sectarian Islamic democracy. Indeed, when prompted to guarantee special rights for Shi'a minorities in return for political

[288] "Al qafas al-jadīd la-dharih al-sayida zaynab' *al-Zamān*, 15/8/1332.
[289] Al-Dharih al-fadhī al muhdā, 1954, File 1, Majma' al-Sayyeda Zaynab li al-Ma'lūmāt wa al-Abhāth, Murtadha Family Private Papers, Sitt Zaynab, Syria.

support, Jinnah had instead responded, "We must so organize the Muslim League that justice is done to every sect and section inside it," demurring on the request for exceptional treatment for Shi'a Muslims.[290] Though Habib would similarly shy away from tying himself to a sectarian identity in the early years of the Pakistani state, as many of the influential Shi'as among Jinnah's supporters did, the reluctance was not inconsistent with the personal reverence for Zaynab bint 'Ali. Being Shi'a was a lived and fluid identity, one that took on salience in particular moments and acts of practice. Yet the deliberate choice of Sayyeda Zaynab was an interesting one, as female shrines have long been associated with more familial, domestic concerns. Her connection as the 'mother of all hardships,' her association with the martyrs of Shi'sim, and increasing narratives tying her directly to the infallibles made her shrine appealing. Yet it was also a more permissive site, welcoming donations and support at time when the shrine cities of Iran and Iraq faced increasing suppression.

The vigorous support of Iranian Shi'as would also be critical, both through official and unofficial channels. In 1954, in a letter from the Iranian embassy in Damascus to the Shah's personal office, the envoy noted that not long previously, the shrine had been an insignificant and unmaintained village outside of Damascus. However, he reported, through the "joint efforts" of Syrian Shi'a with ties to the government and with local Iranian encouragement, the road leading to the village of al-Sitt had recently been paved. As a result, "the numbers of pilgrims, including Iranians,

[290] Letter from Muhammad Ali Jinnah to Maharaj Kumar Amīr Haydar Khan, *Ridhākār* (Lahore), 1 March 1946, 4.

and construction at the shrine had increased."[291] Indeed, the Shah's private office remained interested in the Sayyeda Zaynab and was kept abreast through the embassy and the shrine committee, despite uneasy political relations between the two countries. Tensions grew from Syria's strong Arab nationalist tint, coupled with Iran's pro-Western alliance and membership in the Baghdad Pact treaty of military cooperation. Yet Muhammad Reza Shah's secularization did not preclude interest in the Sayyeda Zaynab. Mahdi Bahbahāni noted in letters to the Iranian embassy in Syria and to the Shah's wife that through "support from His Imperial Majesty and the voluntary donation of Queen Soraya Pahlavi," the electricity for the new expansive setup had been established.[292] The involvement and donations from the Shah and Queen of Iran belied easy binaries between sectarian and secular, Arab and Persian. On the heels of a coup deposing the popular Iranian Prime Minister, Mohammad Mosaddegh, a donation to Zaynab bint 'Ali's shrine would appeal to popular sentiment, while keeping support away from the shrine cities of Iran, which were centers of opposition to the regime. Yet in the bequest of Queen Soraya can be read multiple factors and motivations in the complex web of meanings that are captured by human action. While named donations had historically been a public means of currying popular favor, Zaynab's unique standing amongst Shi'a faithful added a powerful component. The gendered dynamic, in particular, resonated in Queen Soraya's donation, with Zaynab's growing stature in Shi'a narratives and lamentation rituals. Yet genuine faith and a desire to express that through the donation to a revered Shi'a saint

[291] Letter from Minister Plenipotentiary, file no. 621/27, 31/3/1333 (1954), Iranian Embassy Damascus, number 63. Archives of the Iranian Foreign Ministry, Tehran, Iran.
[292] Letter from Mahdi Bahbahāni to her Imperial Majesty, Queen Soraya, February 12, 1955, File 12, Majma' al-Sayyeda Zaynab li al-Ma'lūmāt wa al-Abhāth, Murtadha Family Private Papers, Sitt Zaynab, Syria. See also File no. 2563, 25/11/1333, Iranian Embassy Damascus, number 63. Archives of the Iranian Foreign Ministry, Tehran, Iran.

cannot be ignored. While the Shah continued his father's secularization policies, he himself enjoyed mostly cordial relations with the most senior and leading *marja'* in Shi'ism, Grand Ayatollah Syed Hossein Borujerdi, whose general quietism on political affairs was said to have caused some concessions in religious instruction.[293] Political calculations may have been at play in the Iranian court's interest in the Sayyeda Zaynab, but like many of the contemporary gifts to the Sayyeda Zaynab, donations to the shrine allowed the expression of individual piety at a site that was gaining increasing attention in the Shi'a world.

The impact of Iranian artists and donations from devotees around the world would slowly transform the aesthetic character of the Sayyeda Zaynab, in a time where appeals to Arab history and heritage were strong. In 1953, the Shah was informed that the famed Iranian artist Muhammad Sanīy' Khatem had been commissioned by a group of businessmen to work on a decorative tomb for Zaynab.[294] Khatem had previously provided his work for the shrines in Iraq and Iran and would work for 13 months on handcrafting the new tomb, worth 200,000 Syrian pounds and of "the highest personal artistry."[295] The box arrived in Syria to great fanfare, accompanied by an Iranian delegation of businessmen, artists, and officers from the army. To mark its installation, the shrine committee and the two *mutawalli* organized a teatime celebration at the Sayyeda Zaynab on April 20, 1955. For this "auspicious ceremony, on the occasion of the unveiling of the new tomb (dharih al-abnūsi) donated by the government and people

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[293] Roy Mottahedeh, *The Mantle of the Prophet: Religion and Politics in Iran* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2008), 230-235.
[294] Letter from Ambassador of Iran to Shah's Private Secretary. file no. 10999, 19/8/1332, Iranian Embassy Damascus, number 63. Archives of the Iranian Foreign Ministry, Tehran, Iran.
[295] "Wasūl al-sandūq 'iranniy' lil-Sayyeda Zaynab," *Majalah Al-'Irfān Al-Lubnaniyya*, Vol. 42, 29, March 14, 1955.

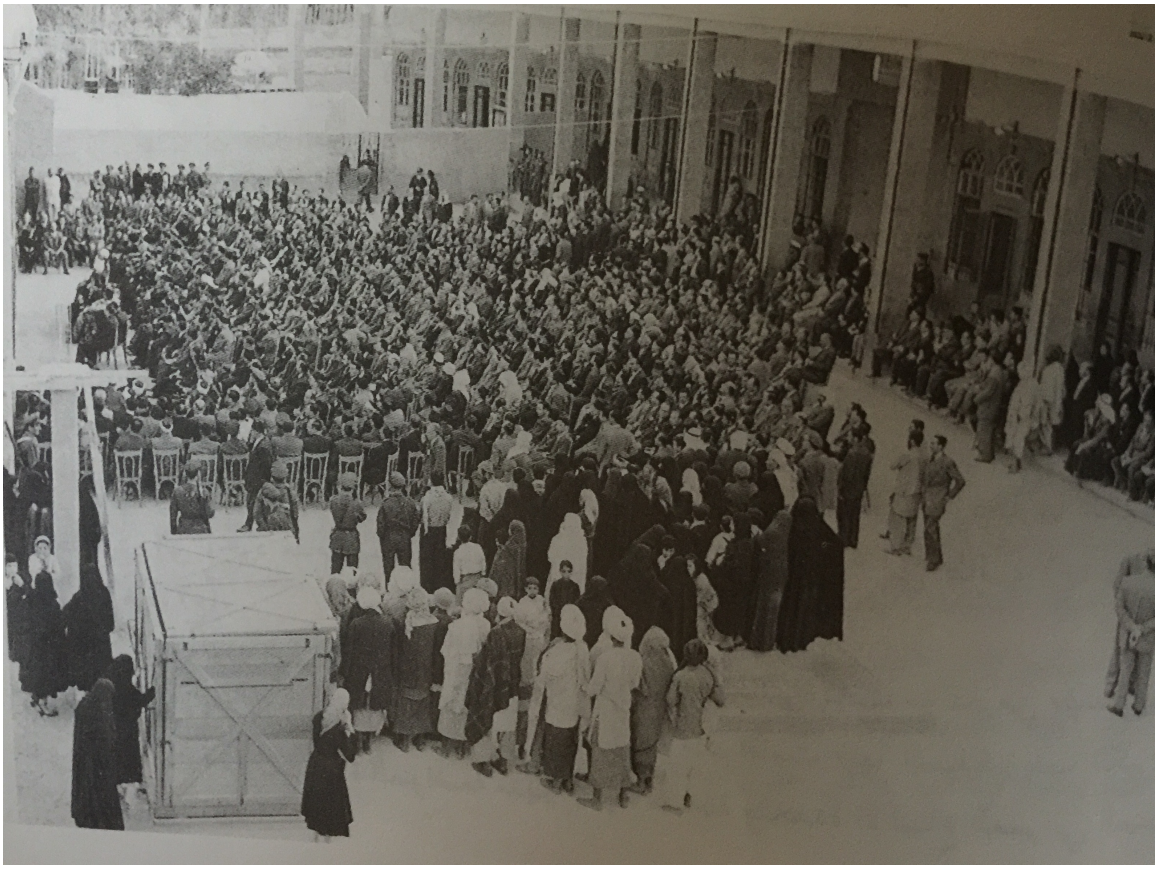
of Iran," Muhsin and Radha Murtadha extended an invitation to Syria's Prime Minister Sabri al-'Asali, member of the National Bloc and one of the most influential nationalists of the independence era.[296] The aesthetics of the ceremony captured the conflicting dynamics of the Sayyeda Zaynab, the 'in-betweenness' and fluid forces at play in the shrine. Al-'Asali would preside over a large ribbon-cutting ceremony in the shrine's tomb and the now-expansive courtyard, his presence meant to "celebrate a pinnacle of Syrian culture," surrounded by the Murtadha family, members of the shrine committee, and religious scholars and pilgrims. Yet the Iranian donation drew the shrine outwards, creating an ornamental link between the Sayyeda Zaynab and the Shi'a shrine cities of Iran and Iraq and marking it as a more distinctly Shi'a site. Al-Asali was part of the old guard of Syrian nationalists, a predominantly Sunni cadre of leaders who advocated a secular Arab nationalism. Dressed in a Western suit and an Ottoman style fez, al-Asali's physical representation offered a particular and 'official' sanctioning of the Sayyeda Zaynab, his presence meant to validate the Arab and Syrian importance of the shrine. He embodied Damascus – a city of Syrians, urban, predominantly secular. Al-Asali posed extensively for photographs with the bureaucrats and pilgrims present for the large gathering. In one photograph, numerous religious scholars dressed in traditional robes flank him, scores of whom had come to the shrine to celebrate an important occasion at the new shrine.

[296] Copy of invitation to "Al-Ihtifāl bi-nisb dharih al-Sayyeda Zaynab", 27 Sha'ban, 1374 (20 April, 1955). Records of Lajna' Ashrāf 'alā Maqām al-Sayyeda Zaynab, Sitt Zaynab, Syria.

(Figure 3.3: Sabri al-Asali and guests at the Sayyeda Zaynab, 1955)

Yet perhaps the most telling pictures remain the photographs of the crowds at the ceremony for Zaynab bint ‘Ali. Male bureaucrats and guests of honor in suits and clerical robes were seated in dozens of rows in the courtyard behind al-Asali and the Iranian ambassador. Yet huddled in small groups in the fringes observing the ceremony are veiled women, many in full black robes, or *chador,* a female security guard peering from around the box that carried the new tomb, and a group of lower class men, identified by their style of dress, with turbans, coats and shawls topping long cotton shirts and loose bottoms. These were the everyday pilgrims to the Sayyeda Zaynab, those that frequented the shrine for *ziyārat* and to offer daily prayers. Their presence speaks to the daily use

and milieu of the shrine – not by foreign dignitaries or political leaders, but by religious scholars and nearby residents, those who had likely been visiting the shrine for prayers when stumbling across the elaborate ceremony in the courtyard.[297]



(Figure 3.4: Ceremony in the courtyard of the Sayyeda Zaynab shrine)

Indeed, it is their presence at the Sayyeda Zaynab, in ever growing numbers, which prompted the concern amongst the shrine committee to expand the shrine and make it comfortable for pilgrims. A 1954 letter from the Iranian envoy in Damascus to the Shah's office indicates that many were traveling to Damascus to make a regular

[297] Photograph of ceremony, April 1955, Records of Lajna' Ashrāf 'alā Maqām al-Sayyeda Zaynab, Sitt Zaynab, Syria.

ziyārat, especially with the political climate in Iraq closing opportunities for regular Shi'a pilgrimage. The presence of these pilgrims and their growing engagement can be read through the detailed concerns of shrine officials and religious scholars, who often spoke on the behalf of these visitors and addressed their concerns, even though in the official records their voices on the day-to-day practice at the shrine remain limited. Yet Shias around the world, including women, were expressing an interest in the use and visitation of the space. In a letter sent to a resident of Pakistan's Data Ganj Baksh region, a pilgrim that set out to do hajj with his wife recounts to his daughter that they had made the *niyat*, or intention, to visit the shrine of Sayyeda Zaynab along the way. Afzal Mahmood was informed that her mother had desired "to visit the grave of her Bibi to give *pursa* [condolences] for her suffering and request her intercession in [your] marriage matter." According to Sajjid Majmood, they had written off a small donation at the shrine, and his wife had wanted that amount to be in her own name. His wife did not pen the note, leaving the narration to her more literate husband, yet her desire for ownership in the named donation highlights the personal connection she felt with Zaynab.[298]

Yet beyond proactive expansion and promotion of the Sayyeda Zaynab, pilgrims' concerns were sometimes recorded with the shrine committee and with leading '*ulama* who were kept abreast of the shrine's progress, prompting religious and financial responses. In a letter to Ayatollah Tabataba'ī, Mahdi Bahbahāni assured him that the

[298] Letter from Sajjid Majmood to Afzal Mahmood, April 15, 1961 [29th Shawwal], field notes, conversation with Afzal Mahmood, December 27-28, 2010, Lahore. The letter was the private property of the subject, one I discovered in one of my first fieldwork trips to Lahore. Afzal Mahmood was a family friend, part of a well-connected political family who had offered to make introductions to Auqaf officials at Bibi Pak Daman when I first began a paper on the subject. Afzal's father had been a *pir* at Data Ganj Baksh, in addition to a wealthy businessman. In conversation, I mentioned the dissertation was going to be focused on the Sayyeda Zaynab shrine, and she offered the above anecdote and letter.

issues that pilgrims had complained to him about – "that there is no place in that facility to make visitors feel comfortable" – had been addressed. Many were sleeping outside in the elements, catching illness and disease. To ease the struggle, 45 chambers had been constructed and it had been decided that he would "meet with several carpet merchants in Tehran. We asked from each of them to donate a piece that is 12 meters for this purpose. I am confident that the devotion of these merchants will lead them to accept these charitable requests that will enhance the experience of *ziyārat*."[299] The letter was signed and returned stamped with Tabataba'ī's personal ensign and a brief message of support for this endeavor. According to Syed Kazem Shariatmadāri, one of the leading *marja'* in Iran, the efforts to build the shrine "for greatest comfort" was critical for believers everywhere, yet the work had still not been accomplished, and problems remained. He noted, "In order to complete this project [Bahbahāni] requires more assistance from the believers, religious authorities, and merchants, especially those who visit her blessed tomb. Each of those people should help according to his capacity. By God's will, they will be among those Blessed on the Day of Judgment."[300] Yet much of the focus was on the importance of sanitary conditions, with many pilgrims who made the journey falling ill and news of this reaching their religious leaders. These practical considerations of plumbing, lack of food storage, electricity, and a functioning slaughterhouse remained a critical focus for *marja'* – the pilgrims performing *ziyārat* to the Sayyeda Zaynab were

[299] Copy of letter from Mahdi Bahbahāni to His Excellency Hujj al-Islam Ayatollah Tabataba'ī al Qummī, 8 jami' al-awwal 1375, December 23 1955. Records of Lajna' Ashrāf 'alā Maqām al-Sayyeda Zaynab, Sitt Zaynab, Syria. The copy of the letter was returned and stamped with a brief note: "In His name, if you believe this undertaking will be accomplished it will be of great pleasure and support our religious endeavors."
[300] Fatwa from Syed Mohammad Kazem Shariatmadari, 12 jami' al-awwal 1375, December 1955, Records of Lajna' Ashrāf 'alā Maqām al-Sayyeda Zaynab, Sitt Zaynab, Syria.

numerous enough that news of day to day conditions and concerns remained relevant. Many were clearly in contact with these religious authorities, writing letters or sitting in audience upon return from their *ziyārat*. Syed Abdul Husayn Sharaf al-Dīn, Muhsin al-Amīn's former rival and *marja'* of Lebanon reported to his followers, "You have learned about the efforts of the good servant, al-Hajj Mahdi Bahbahāni, in the construction of the shrine of Our Lady, the Best of the Women and the Wise, and Exemplar of the Prophethood." Sharaf al-Dīn continued that the importance of locating a safe and constant source of water was of utmost concern, as many had complained of suffering "great difficulties." Yet, he noted, the ability to do so depended on the finances available, and thus he designated Bahbahāni his representative to receive *sahm al-Imam* from endowments made in the name of the *ahl al-Bayt*.[301] Through the letters between the shrine committee and religious leaders, the day-to-day hardships that pilgrims endured and their ability to create change through their persistence and engagement are illuminated. Yet while Shi'a tradition and guidance from the Imams had emphasized that the physical discomfort of *ziyārat* was meant to bring pilgrims closer to the suffering of Shi'a martyrs, encouraging further visitation in face of hardship and restrictions, these correspondences reveal a modern and practical concern for ease.

In response to the complaints over difficulties and inadequacies at the shrine, rapid attempts were made to alleviate these concerns, with *'ulama* often raising these issues and encouraging more generous donations. The unofficial bonds of influence and religious authority had proven strong, even as these same scholars found themselves on

[301] Letter from Hujj al-Islam, Syed Abdul Husayn Sharaf al-Dīn to Syed Muhsin Murtadha, 9 Rabbi al awwal 1376 , October 14, 1956, Records of Lajna' Ashrāf 'alā Maqām al-Sayyeda Zaynab, Sitt Zaynab, Syria.

the retreat in political spheres. Yet these *marja'* called on Shi'as to affirm their identities in acts of giving with significant results, and in turn these pilgrims expected engagement from their religious leaders. The growing involvement of Iranian Shi'as, investing and contributing to the expansion of the Sayyeda Zaynab in significant efforts, would lead the Syrian Ministry of Awqaf to request notification and approval of larger donations.[302] The secular Syrian state, which had acquiesced in the Lajna's autonomous role in administrating the shrine, nevertheless felt some unease with the unchecked influx of donations for a Shi'a shrine. Much of it remained outside official channels, with the state apparatus unable to monitor and benefit from these sacred exchanges. For the government, as under the Mandate era, a tacit acceptance of the shrine was predicated on its centrality to the region and the Arab 'character' of the support, a link Muhsin al-Amīn and the Murtadha family had been careful to cultivate and one that the emphasis on funneling donations through the Syrian Awqaf officials was meant to maintain. Yet the effectiveness both of donations and the centralizing control of the committee had propelled the site into a substantial draw for many around the world to capture and express 'being Shi'a.' It provided a space for leading *ulama*, many in retreat politically in their national contexts, to encourage engagement and wield their influence to create a new Shi'a space. The shrine allowed for all these interpretations – claiming a long and unchanged tradition of *ziyārat* to Shi'a shrines, even as new concerns and rationale were employed. Its newness allowed individuals and communities to galvanize around acts of giving and impart meaning, expanding the Sayyeda Zaynab into a critical Shi'a site.

[302] File no. 630/36, 15/4/1336 (1958), 19/7/2535 Iranian Embassy Damascus, number 63. Archives of the Iranian Foreign Ministry, Tehran, Iran.

A New Regime

On March 8th, 1963, the Military Committee of the Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party would enact a coup d'état in Damascus to form a new government, just one month after the Ba'athist overthrow in Iraq. The Ba'athist Party, inspired by the ideological works of founders Michel 'Aflaq and Salah al-Bittar, argued that the united Arab nation had been divided by imperialist meddling, and that the Arab nation was in need of resurrection (*ba'ath*) and social reforms.[303] The party would find its base of support in the country's middle class, peasants, and landowners in rural communities – many of whom would form the basis of the military's membership.[304] Ba'athist support included the strong backing of Syria's numerous minorities, in particular the Alawites, who had yet to achieve full integration into the ideological and economic developments of the Syrian state, despite the aspirations of the Mandate era and the *fatwa* issued decades earlier by Hajj Amin al-Husaynī declaring them 'orthodox' Muslims.

The creation of the United Arab Republic in 1958 had caused many of the formal organizational structures of the Ba'ath party to disappear, but the dissolution of the UAR in 1961 reconstituted the party around a core group of military officers who would lead the coup. Yet the failure of the union between Egypt and Syria and the apparent endurance of the post-WWII borders proved an implicit challenge to transnational

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[303] See Michel 'Aflaq, *Fī Sabīl al-ba'ath* (Beirut, Dār al-Taliah, 1963) for more on the ideological components of the Ba'athist party.

[304] For more on the Ba'athist Party and ideology, their rise to power, and demographic makeup, see John Galvani, "Syria and the Baath Party," *MERIP Reports,* No. 25 (Feb. 1974), 3-16; John F. Delvin, *The Ba'ath Party: A History from its Origins to 1966* (Stanford: Hoover Institute, 1976); Hanna Batutu, "Some Observations on the Social Roots of Syria's Ruling Military Group and the Causes for its Dominance," *Middle East Journal* 25 (Summer, 1981); 331-344; Itamar Rabinovic, *Syria under the Ba'ath, 1963-1966: The Army-Party Symbiosis* (NY, 1972), Nikolaos van Dam, *The Struggle for Power in Syria: Sectarianism, Regionalism, and Tribalism in Politics, 1961-1978* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1979).

ideologies, including the Arab Ba'athist doctrine. A split would soon emerge within the Ba'athist leadership between those of 'Aflaq's loyalists that advocated a more ideological transnational policy and those that supported a more regionalist, less doctrinaire orientation, led by Defense Minister Lieutenant General Hafez al-Assad. The 1967 war with Israel, however, and the resounding defeat of the Arab states would discredit much of the current leadership across the Arab world. On March 1st, 1969, Hafez al-Assad maneuvered a shift in power, placing President Nurredin al-Attassi and Major General Salah Jadid under house arrest. Yet it was not immediately clear that al-Assad was trying to take over the Government, as observers "believed his aim was to impose not himself but a policy – that of military cooperation with Iraq against Israel."[305] Al-Assad was the de facto authority, yet Jadid retained some trappings of political power. However, in early 1971, after botched Syrian intervention in Jordan's Black September civil war, al-Assad would become the first Alawī president of Syria, after centuries of *fatwa* declaring them non-Muslims and suffering extensive political and religious persecution.[306]

The period of tumult was not limited to internal Syrian politics, however. In Iraq, the rise of the Iraqi Ba'ath party would lead to severe crackdowns on Shi'a *ulama* and the shrine cities, spurring the underground formation of the Shi'a al-Da'wa party.[307] The

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[305] Dana Adams Schmidt, "Holiday Shrouds Changes in Syria; Damascus Said to Be Calm," *The New York Times,* March 2, 1969.
[306] Matti Moosa, *Extremist Shiites: The Ghulat Sects* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1988).
[307] The coup of Abd al-Karim al-Qasim in 1958 would result in widespread opposition from Shi'a 'ulama, who both opposed the secularizing measures he undertook and in particular land reform measures, which threatened the political and economic base of power for the clerical establishment. In addition, the rise of leftist parties in Iraq in the 1950s and 1960s attracted many among the Shi'a. As a response, the Hizb al-Da'wa al-Islāmiyya party was formed, under the charismatic leadership of Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr, a young religious scholar from a well known 'ulama family, and Mahdi al-Hakim, the son of the most senior Shi'a *marja'* of the period,

creation of the Palestinian Liberation Organization and the effects of subsequent decades of war with Israel would bleed into Syria, resulting in changing demographics and newly radicalized population of Sunni refugees settling around the Sayyeda Zaynab. In Iran, the Shah's White Revolution reforms were designed to break the influence of landowning elite and the *ulama*; the Shi'a clerical classes would organize in staunch opposition, and Ruhollah Khomeini would gain widespread popularity, giving the Shah a new outspoken critic. Khomeini would be exiled in 1963, but the boom and bust cycles of Iran's economy and the Shah's ostentatious displays of wealth would lead to growing discontent. In neighboring Lebanon, Musa al-Sadr had turned his focus on the country's substantial Shi'a community in attempts to galvanize them into a powerful and united force in the sectarian political system. This charismatic religious and political leader had taken over the leadership of Lebanon's Shi'as after the death of Ayatollah Sharaf al-Dīn, signaling a change in guard away from the predominantly quietist Shi'a leadership of the previous decades.

While the Sayyeda Zaynab had emerged as a result of individual and community donations, the political currents and upheavals in the Middle East would enter the space of the shrine. What it meant to be a Syrian, who was a Shi'a, and the political relationship with shrine spaces would change. It would become a site of refuge for Shi'as from different countries, transforming the nature of the shrine and its visitors. In addition,

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Ayatollah Muhsin al-Hakim. The rise to power of the Ba'thist regime in 1968 would leave to massive crackdowns on al-Da'wa. Just months before Shari'ati's death, in February 1977, al-Da'wa organized its largest opposition to the government in its Safar Intifada, leading to massive protests in Shi'a southern Iraq and widespread arrests. For more on the development of al-Da'wa, see Hanna Batutu, "Shi'i organizations in Iraq: al-Da'wah al-Islamiyah and al-Muhahidin,' in *Shi'ism and Social Protest*, ed. Juan Cole and Nikki Keddie (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986) and Rodger Shanahan, "Shi'a Political Development in Iraq: the case of the Islamic Da'wa Party," *Third World Quarterly,* Vol. 25, No. 5, (2004), 943-953.

Shi'ism in Syria would increasingly become synonymous with the Alawīs, and with a nominally Shi'a-led government in place, engagement with the Sayyeda Zaynab became fraught with new ideological considerations and symbolism. Yet the period nevertheless saw the most dramatic expansions and ornamentation of the space thus far, as the groundwork that previously had been laid by shrine leaders and religious authorities came to fruition. In 1965, a new gold dome was constructed, financed by Iranian businessmen and designed by Hajj Qasem Hamdani.[308] Along with other Iranian pilgrims, tiles were laid in the courtyard, new verandas and rooms were built, and the family of Muhammad Ali Habib commissioned new ornate pillars by Iranian artists.[309] Aesthetically and financially, the Sayyeda Zaynab would be brought closer into the Iranian orbit, with internal turmoil in Syria and crackdowns in Iraq limiting Arab donations. In the course of a few decades, it had transformed from a site that needed the encouragement and authentication of local elites and *marja'* into a visual spectacle, one designed to draw attention to the assertively Shi'a and new aesthetics of the shrine. The Ministry of Awqaf would again reiterate with the Iranian Embassy in Syria the need for donations to be registered directly through official channels to protect the integrity of the donations and also prevent any wrongdoing, with the new Ba'athist state under al-Assad more conscious of its engagement with religion.[310]

The intersection between the Sayyeda Zaynab and the Murtadha family, the Ba'athist government, and transnational Shi'a forces would become more complex. The

[308] IMF file nr. 1194, 13/6/1344, Iranian Embassy Damascus, number 63. Archives of the Iranian Foreign Ministry, Tehran, Iran.
[309] Radha Murtadha, "Tarikh al-banā' fī maqām al-Sayyeda Zaynab."
[310] file no. 896, 19/7/2535 Iranian Embassy Damascus, number 63. Archives of the Iranian Foreign Ministry, Tehran, Iran.

shrine would be officially registered in the new Awqaf Department in 1966, with the support of Shi'ism's Grand Ayatollah Muhsin al-Hakīm authenticating the Murtadha family's hereditary claim as *mutawalli* of the Sayyeda Zaynab. Al-Hakīm received a copy of the original waqf from Syed Muhsin and Radha Murtadha, and he noted, "I acknowledge that they [who wrote it] have authorization from the descendants of al-*Wāqif,* may God increase his standing. The executors of this waqf, may God praise and aid them, were able to carry out this waqf to their abilities, have not changed or replaced anything, and retained control of the waqf."[311] The Awqaf Department would continue to allow the shrine committee to operate in the administration of the shrine, but the Sayyeda Zaynab had become one of the most prominent sites in Syria, and the shrine committee would manage a careful relation with the Awqaf Department. Yet it was one of the rare religious sites not in complete control of Awqaf officials after the Ba'athist coup, with a new regime that balanced a secular agenda and its ethno-religious ties cautiously. The history of the Sayyeda Zaynab and the established ties of the Murtadha family would allow them greater leeway than other Shi'a sites in Syria, many that would increasingly be seen as Iranian-created and dominated.[312] The site could still be positioned as an authentic 'Syrian' site, one that had an Islamic heritage and a tradition of caretakers grounded in the local.

Yet despite the state's recognition of the Sayyeda Zaynab, the "Shiitization" – and sectarianization – of the site would nevertheless begin in earnest after al-Assad's

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[311] Letter from Muhsin al-HakĪm to Syed Muhsin and Syed Radha Murtadha, 5 Rajab 1386. October 19, 1966, File 7, Majma' al-Sayyeda Zaynab li al-Ma'lūmāt wa al-Abhāth, Murtadha Family Private Papers, Sitt Zaynab, Syria.

[312] See Chapter 5 for discussion on the resistance to the Sayyeda Ruqayyah shrine, a site in the Old City of Damascus that was the beneficiary of heavy Iranian interest.

Ba'athist takeover, though for reasons and an opening of power dynamics extending beyond religious impulses. Radha Murtadha himself would be appointed the president of the Office of Education and Director General in 1969 and remain in the role for over 20 years. From that position, he would support the creation of new institutional centers around the Sayyeda Zaynab – though oppose the over-proliferation of 'traditional' schools. Nevertheless, developments would nonetheless mark the shrine as a decidedly Shi'a site. In 1973, the first Shi'a religious seminary was established at the Sayyeda Zaynab, founded by the Iraqi Syed Hassan Shirazi (d. 1983), part of an extended family of Shi'a scholars and activists that had been exiled by the Iraqi Ba'athist regime. Indeed, on-going tensions with the Iraqi regime and the crackdown on religious authority in Iran would create an influx of clerical and Shi'a refugees into Syria, where they were granted asylum. The Shirazi family, including Syed Hassan and his brother Muhammad, had advocated an active transnational and revolutionary approach to Shi'ism, with members of the family displaced from Iran and Iraq to the Gulf states, Lebanon, and Syria in the 1970s.[313] The presence of growing numbers of exiled Shi'as and the newness of the *hawza* Zaynabiyya would result in a more activist stance on Shi'a theology and jurisprudence, one that was generally permitted by the new Syrian state.[314]

The same year of 1973 marked critical new developments in transforming the Sayyeda Zaynab into a politically sectarian site, one that had expanded well beyond al-Amīn's hopes for a shrine that provided comfort for Syria's pilgrims. The shrine itself was already being drawn into a new rhetoric reinterpreting the lives of Shi'a martyrs,

[313] Louër, *Transnational Shi'a Politics,* 89-92.
[314] For more on the *hawza* Zaynabiyya see Khalid Sindawi, "The Zaynabiyya Hawza in Damascus and its Role in Shī'ite Religious Instruction," *Middle Eastern Studies,* 45 (2009), 859-79.

with active discussion of the role of Zaynab stemming from larger debates on the role of Islam in the modem world. After years of individual and group donations, in 1973 the Iranian and Syrian governments would conclude an agreement to cooperate in the renovation and expansion of the Sayyeda Zaynab, the first time that either government had sanctioned an official agreement on the shrine.[315] The cooperation on the state level marked a new awareness for al-Assad's regime in understanding the political salience of supporting such an emotively powerful Shi'a shrine, within the context of religious protests that had emerged around the country. In March 1973, al-Assad's regime had approved a new non-sectarian constitution, which did not designate Islam as the religion of the state. Massive Sunni protests erupted across Syrian cities against the regime, with new charges leveled that Alawīs were not Muslims. Multiple assassination plots were claimed by secret police in their crackdown against protestors claiming al-Assad was the "enemy of Allah."[316] When faced with the prospect of discontent amongst the majority Sunni population and a lingering unease about the orthodoxy of the Alawī sect, the regime, so avowedly secular in its takeover, searched for authentication. It found it in the form of Musa al-Sadr, who had been pressing Alawī shaykhs in Lebanon to come under the umbrella of his newly established Supreme Islamic Shi'ite Council. For Musa al-Sadr, Shi'a unity in Lebanon would increase their political leverage and bargaining position, but the small Alawī population had resisted incorporation and loss of autonomy. Now, with the Syrian regime facing opposition based on religious legitimacy, the ties between the Alawites and Musa al-Sadr became mutually beneficial. In a speech in 1973, al-Sadr

[315] Radha Murtadha, "Tarikh al-banā' fī maqām al-Sayyeda Zaynab."
[316] "Executions in Syria for plot reported," *The New York Times,* Aug. 30, 1973 and *Al-Hayat,* February 25, 1973.

declared, "those Muslims known as Alawīs are brothers of those Shi'as called *'mutawallis,'"* appropriating the word that had long been used as a derogatory reference to Lebanon's Shi'as. One of Musa al-Sadr's Alawī appointees remarked, "we belong to the Ja'fari school…and our religion is Islam."[317]

Musa al-Sadr's embrace of the Alawites would ostensibly label the regime as both secular and Shia-oriented, dominated by a minority that had long been ostracized by even Shi'a religious authorities. It would represent a new paradigm of 'being Shi'a' in Syria, now linked to the Ba'athist regime and its interests. With the growing influx of Shi'a refugees and increasing agitation amongst Shi'a populations in Iran, Iraq, and Lebanon, the ever-expanding Sayyeda Zaynab would come to represent those in the margins, searching for authenticity and power. From al-Amīn's new interpretations of tradition to al-Sadr's legitimization, from the worries over fresh water to the laying of expansive marble courtyards, the Sayyeda Zaynab shrine was a decidedly modern site, drawing its resonance from its purported link to early Islamic and Arab roots while emerging through a range of pressures as a critical site. It was the Iranian Revolution, however, that would irrevocably transform it into a sectarian site, fraught with new implications and political salience.

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On June 26th, 1977, the body of Iranian ideologue and sociologist Ali Shari'ati was flown from London and laid to rest in an elaborate ceremony in the newly renovated cemetery at the Sayyeda Zaynab shrine. After years of surveillance by the Iranian secret

[317] Statement by Musa al-Sadr and Supreme Islamic Shiite Council, *Al-Nahār*, 7 July 1973.

service SAVAK and imprisonment by the Shah in solitary confinement, Shari'ati had been released in 1975 and later allowed to leave Iran, leaving in his wake a country that his ideas had sent hurling towards revolution.[318] Shari'ati would die in London at the young age of 44 in what his followers would claim were mysterious circumstances, another death added to Shi'ism's pantheon of martyrs. He would be buried in a customized marble tomb at the Sayyeda Zaynab, near the woman whose role as the messenger of Karbala he had sought to emulate and whose courage and strength he had framed as the Muslim Joan of Arc.[319] Reports of his funeral would remark on the fitting final resting place of the Sayyeda Zaynab shrine. It was "the culmination of the blood and the message," a local paper in Pakistan noted, and Shari'ati's burial at the Sayyeda Zaynab meant that, like for Husayn, even after his death "the message was most important."[320]

Yet the significance of Shari'ati's funeral at the shrine in 1977 went beyond the ideological and emotional connections to Zaynab herself. Certainly, Shari'ati had raised Zaynab to the status of an iconic and legendary revolutionary in his compelling reinvigoration of the Karbala narrative, though the process of reimagining Zaynab's role in Shi'a history had been ongoing. These narratives about Zaynab had been transformed through the 20th century on a supranational level, from her role as passive witness to

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[318] Mangol Bayat, "Iran's real revolutionary leader," *Christian Science Monitor,* May 24, 1979.
[319] At a series of lectures at the Hosseiniyeh Ershad in 1971, delivered on the occasion of Fatima's birthday, Shari'ati had spoken in *Fatima is Fatima* about a new and deeper understanding of Fatima, positioning her as the Islamic exemplar of the ideal woman. While the majority of the speech was about discrediting the Europeanized woman that emerged in Muslim society and a critique of a lack of knowledge about the true meaning of the life of Fatima, as always, Shari'ati would express his admiration for Zaynab as a powerful symbol of justice and revolution. See Ali Shari'ati, *Fatima is Fatima,* trans. Laleh Bakhtiar (Houston: Book Distribution Center, 1983).
[320] *Janāzah-e-Ali Sharia'ti, mufakar aur moharik Iraniy Damishq mein pohonch gaya*, Al-Shaheed, No. 45, July 1, 1977.

Karbala, on whom tragedies were visited upon, to a powerful messenger of Muhammad and ‘Ali. Yet the dynamics of the scene on the ground also reflected the growing political and religious alliances that were reflected on the space of the newly prominent Sayyeda Zaynab shrine, which had just decades earlier been an unassuming brick and mortar structure in a small village outside of Damascus. Shari’ati’s body had been unable to return to Iran, caught in the throes of unrest his writings had helped to provoke, and the Iraqi shrine cities had become increasingly inhospitable and inaccessible with the government’s crackdown on the Islamic Shi’a Al-Da’wa party. Through political, religious, and community support, Sayyeda Zaynab shrine had undergone extensive development and emerged as an attractive alternative site, one that had attained the same resonance as the shrines to the male Imams.

Attended by dignitaries, religious scholars, and the growing transnational community of Shi’as, Shari’ati’s funeral would also mark the new alliances and ideologies that had emerged around the shrine in the preceding decades. The proceedings were officiated by Musa al-Sadr, who had fostered the close ties with the Alawī-led Ba’thist government and Iranian opposition to the Shah.[321] Shari’ati had admired al Sadr’s work in galvanizing the Shi’a of southern Lebanon and had visited al Sadr in Lebanon a number of times. Those gathered for Shari’ati’s funeral prayers presented a mix of Iranian dissidents, shrine authorities, ‘Alawī Ba’athist government officials, and Shi’a students and scholars from the new *hawza Zaynabiyya* – a visual that highlighted the unique forces that had transformed the Sayyeda Zaynab shrine into a critical space in

[321] Martin Kramer, *Arab Awakening and Islamic Revival: The Politics of Ideas in the Middle East* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1996) 203-204.

the post WWII landscape.[322] As it had three decades earlier, the shrine again provided both a sacred and profane space in the funeral of an influential figure, with mourners gathering as national and international events appeared to be spiraling towards change. Like at Mahdi Murtadha's funeral in 1945, the shrine was itself a powerful actor and meaning-maker in Shari'ati's funeral, embodying both an evocative religious and personal connection and the changing ideological and political landscape. Yet the differences were instructive – the shrine, too, had changed, with a new guard of supporters filling the space. The constancy of the Murtadha family was, on the surface, a sign of the unchanged endurance of traditional forms of familial authority in the face of great upheaval. Yet it was the flexibility and newer alliances of the Murtadha caretakers, in particular their involvement with the new Ba'athist government and a perceived loyalty to the state's apparatus, that allowed them to continue to operate the Sayyeda Zaynab with relative autonomy. The presence of Alawī Ba'ath officials at the shrine presented a dramatically different portrait. While Mahdi Murtadha's funeral in many ways represented a gathering of nationalist figures and traditional notable families, signaled by the choice of Fares al-Khoury to eulogize Murtadha, Shari'ati's funeral demonstrated the pull outwards and increasing sectarian nature of the Sayyeda Zaynab, embodied in the complex linkages that Musa al-Sadr himself drew on.

The Sayyeda Zaynab was increasingly linked to debates over what it meant to be Shi'a in an evolving transnational landscape. The development of the Sayyeda Zaynab was a microcosm for larger disputes playing out on a national level, as the Syrian state

[322] *Syed Radha Murtadha ma'a qabr 'Ali Shari'ati*. Photograph, File 1. Majma' al-Sayyeda Zaynab li al-Ma'lūmāt wa al-Abhāth, Murtadha Family Private Papers, Sitt Zaynab, Syria.

progressed from Mandate rule to the Ba'athist coup. While Muhsin al-Amīn had emphasized the Arab nature of the Sayyeda Zaynab and encouraged a committee of local Syrian Shi'a notables to take the lead on promoting the shrine, by the 1970s external pressures were coming to bear on the ground. Ideological debates over the true nature of Islam and the role of Shi'ism in public life would alter what a shrine for Zaynab meant, for the state and the pilgrims that frequented it in growing numbers.

Chapter Four
'A Blessing on Our People': Bibi Pak Daman and the Nationalized Sacred

On June 3rd, 1970, Noor Jahan, the legendary Pakistani singer and actress, announced her intention to visit the small shrine of Bibi Pak Daman, nestled amongst the bustling narrow streets of Lahore's Old City. Noor Jahan was one of the most influential stars of her time, an icon in Pakistani popular culture that had captured the spirit of a nation during her performance tours in the 1965 India-Pakistan war. Her presence at the shrine for the *urs*, or death anniversary celebrations, of Ruqayyah bint 'Ali was a dramatic affair, one with deep cultural significance.[323] Noor Jahan's visit was heralded as "the mother of melody honoring the mother of our faithful."[324] Government officials who controlled the shrine took care to document the details of her visit, one that had been a tremendous boon to the site. The visit had gone off largely without a hitch, the shrine manger relayed to his superior, except for the unseemly presence of one of the shrine's *mutawalli* caretakers. This particular *mutawalli,* Shah Ali Khan, had become a thorn in the government's side as they attempted to assert control on the site. The manager complained that Noor Jahan "had come to receive the unique blessing of her Bibi Ruqayyah," and the *mutawalli* had taken 500 *rupees* from her to ensure that *majlis* to the Shi'a Imam Husayn and his family was sponsored on her behalf.[325] He continued, "This

[323] The shrine of Bibi Pak Daman (or Damana, pl.) contains 6 grave markers. The most widely disseminated narrative is that the main mausoleum in Bibi Pak Daman belongs to Bibi Ruqayyah bint 'Ali, daughter of 'Ali ibn Abu Talib, the fourth of the 'Rightly Guided' Caliphs (*Rāshidūn*) and the first Shi'a Imam. The five others are markers for her female relatives and companions, though explanations vary on whether they are her daughters or husband's sisters.
[324] "Iftatah kāy Tayyāri: Malika-e-Tarannum," *Nawaiwaqt,* June 30, 1970.
[325] A *majlis (*pl. *majālis)* is a Shi'a liturgical mourning ritual commemorating the Shi'a Imams and their families, especially the martyrs of Karbala. In the South Asian context, this usually featured a speech, or *khutba*, recounting the virtues and suffering of the Prophet's descendants

occurrence is necessary to relate to you because this particular *mutawalli* regularly sits in this alley as a pīr and collects money from these devotees that come and go and has made this his sole source of income. It is unseemly that a male attendant should so engage with a respected lady pilgrim of Bibian Pak Damana."[326]

Over a quarter of a century later, another towering figure would celebrate the *urs* at Bibi Pak Daman when Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto visited the shrine with her "Iranian" mother in 1996, a visit that would draw on the resonance of critical Islamic narratives.[327] Though these visits stand out for the impact they had on a national level and the tensions they raised over gender, religious devotion, and government control, the sight of a prominent figure visiting a shrine to a revered saint in Pakistan was certainly not an uncommon one. Pakistan's landscape is dotted with hundreds of shrines, marking the sacred landscape of a country where ties to Sufism and its saints run deep. In rural villages, sites of communal devotionalism are imbedded into the fabric of social life, functioning as centers of education, marriage regulation, family life, and governing the critical distribution of funds and resources. Some grew to provincial and national prominence, spurred by patronage, population growth, and ethnic rivalries. Yet the

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followed by poetic lamentations often accompanied by self-flagellation. The *majlis* and Shi'a mourning rituals have been subject to much extensive scholarship because of their malleability in projecting political, gendered, and cultural ideologies. See Kamran Scot Aghaie, *Shi'i Symbols and Rituals in Modern Iran* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2004); Marie Elaine Hegland, "The Power Paradox in Muslim Women's Majales: North-West Pakistani Mourning Rituals as Sites of Contestation over Religious Politics, Ethnicity, and Gender," *Signs,* Vol. 23, No. 2 (Winter, 1998), 391-428; David Pinault, "Shia Lamentation Rituals and Reinterpretations of the Doctrine of Intercession: Two Cases from Modern India," *History of Religions,* Vol. 38, No. 3 (Feb., 1998), 285-305.

[326] Letter from Assistant Manager for Waqf Properties, Sector V, to the Respected Sir Administrator Auqaf Central Zone. [*trans.]* 6th June 1970. General Records Darbar Hazrat Bibi Pak Daman, Lahore.

[327] "Benazir, Nusrat Open Bibi Pak Daman Urs," *The News International*. October 21, 1996. See Chapter 1, "Transnational Spaces" for full details on the visit.

shrine of Bibi Pak Daman has stood apart since Pakistan's independence in its unique cultural and political significance. It was the newly revitalized shrine to a female saint, one that in narrative, practice, and rhetoric was animated by its firm ties to a distinct supranational Shi'i sacred geography and simultaneously by the rival forces that shape the facts on the ground. From Pakistan's independence through the tumultuous 1970s and Islamization of the 1980s, Bibi Pak Daman was activated and reimagined by debates over nation building and national identity, the nature of religion and gender in public life, and the turbulent effects of geopolitical influences.

The uncertainty over the identities of the women buried at the shrine remained a source of some controversy in the years following Pakistan's independence. Yet those debates over hagiography, narrative, and meaning had a real impact on the physical space of the shrine, creating and exacerbating the conflicts that emerged in the administration of Bibi Pak Daman. While most Sufi saints on the subcontinent traced their lineage to the twelve Shi'a Imams – and indeed derive their spiritual authority from these constructed genealogies – Ruqayyah's status and close link to the family of the Prophet set her apart. The presence of the shrine validated the historic presence of Islam in South Asia, affirmed the idea of a historical Muslim nation, and provided a powerful narrative counterpoint to conservative Islamic ideology. Yet though believers and shrine officials sought at critical moments to establish its place in Islamic, Shi'a, and national sacred geography, Bibi Pak Daman continued to occupy an ambiguous and contested space in both devotional and official discourse.

With the new state's federalization of *waqf* properties in the 1960s and the government's takeover of Bibi Pak Daman in 1967, the debates over Bibi Pak Daman and

religious practice at the shine were exacerbated. The shrine was subsumed under similar governing authority as the numerous shrines to Sufi *pīrs* and saints around Pakistan, despite the multiple factors that clearly made Bibi Pak Daman distinct; this framework would soon provide its own challenges. Like many of these shrines, it did serve a clear social function, linking local religious systems to the wider world of Islam.[328] Yet hagiographies and narratives also worked to ground the shrine within a national milieu, adopting the founding mythologies and tropes as a defense against the 'othering' of the site.[329] Bibi Pak Daman provides the interpretive lens to view the tensions between Shi'a hagiographies and what was the 'accepted' range of Sunni and Sufi practice, between ritual practices that have emerged at the shrine and regulated efforts to extricate Pakistani Islam from its Indian roots. At various moments, the shrine emerged as a flashpoint where tensions between the majority Sunni and minority Shi'a populations become pronounced. Few shrines under the state's control had been subject to such competing interpretations or charged valence, and as a result of the legal environment established after independence, devotees found themselves resorting to government authority to police the differences between sects and enforce the boundaries – both spatially and spiritually – between Sunnis and Shi'as.

Like the Sayyeda Zaynab shrine, this chapter argues that Bibi Pak Daman also constituted an internal frontier shrine: it is a place onto which competing ideologies about

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[328] For more discussion, see Richard Eaton. "The Political and Religious Authority of the Shrine of Baba Farid" in *Moral Conduct and Authority: The Place of Adab in South Asian Islam*. ed. Barbara Daly Metcalf (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

[329] The narrative of Bibi Pak Daman is epic in scope, linking the great heroes and conquerors of Islam in the subcontinent with the family of the Prophet, as famed names as 'Ali, Hussain, Muhammad bin Qasim, Mahmud of Ghazni, and Akbar all figure prominently in literature. See Chapter 1 and 2 of this dissertation.

religion and the state were mapped and conflicts over meaning were played out on the physical space. Like no other shrine, Bibi Pak Daman exemplified the tensions that existed with the new Pakistani state's role as religious arbitrator, the distinction between public space and private enterprise, between state sanctioned religious rhetoric and local traditions, between nationalism and communal rivalry, and within a Shi'i community negotiating these geopolitical events affecting the space of public discourse. Thus, this chapter will focus on the bureaucratic history and contestations around Bibi Pak Daman immediately before and since the federal takeover of the shrine in 1967. Through the 1960s, under the influence of Field Marshall Ayub Khan, Bibi Pak Daman was enmeshed in the ongoing nation-building project and the preoccupation with creating a rationalized and bureaucratized state. For devotees and local leaders, that meant a new reality on the ground, as well as unique anxieties about the presence of a male-dominated state regulating conduct at the shrine of a revered female saint. With the rise of the Bhutto family and the tumultuous 1970s – including the loss of Muslim East Pakistan –the shrine became the flashpoint for new ideologies and rivalries. Finally, following trends in historiography that emphasize the creation of sectarianism, it examines the emergence of sectarian conflict at the shrine in the context of critical national and geopolitical events – the Iranian Revolution and Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, and Zia ul-Haq's Islamization policies of the 1980s – that directly impacted life at Bibi Pak Daman.

The Shrine and the "Ideology of Pakistan"

The importance of Bibi Pak Daman owed in part to the extensive and interwoven histories of Sufism and Shi'ism in the subcontinent, as well as the development of

complex and diverse 'shrine cultures' in Pakistan. Scholarship on Sufism and shrine culture in South Asian history and politics has grown into rich field, bolstered by two important factors. First, Sufism played a significant role in spreading Islam in the Indian subcontinent, creating what is commonly referred to as a multitude of 'lived' Islams.[330] While the traditional dichotomy between doctrinal and ritual Islam has been repeatedly problematized, Sufism is often credited as being the "principal historical force in the spread of Islam in the subcontinent" playing "the dominant role in the evolution and development of popular Islam," allowing recent converts to slowly adapt to a social order grounded in Islamic spirituality.[331] Second, in historiography, the emergence of subaltern studies through the 1980s spurred a new emphasis on locating local voices and traditions. The shrine space, with its traditions and social life, was seen as a more authentic expression of Islamic religious practice. To view these sites through Shi'a doctrine and ritual would thus by extension ignore the development of a syncretic, locally distinct Islam.

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[330] See Annemarie Schimmel and Carl W. Ernst, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1978); Jamal J. Elias, "Sufism," *Iranian Studies*, Vol. 31, No. 3/4, A Review of the "Encyclopaedia Iranica" (Summer-Autumn, 1998), 595-613; Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "Shi'ism and Sufism: Their Relationship in Essence and in History," *Religious Studies,* Vol. 6, No. 3 (Sept., 1970), 229-242; Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *The Garden of Truth: The Vision and Practice of Sufism* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 2007); Meir Hatina, "Religious Culture Contested: The Sufi Ritual of Dawsa in Nineteenth-Century Cairo," *Die Welt des Islams,* New Series, Vol. 47, Issue 1 (2007), 33-62; Daniel Gold, "The Sufi Shrines of Gwalior City: Communal Sensibilities and the Accessible Exotic under Hindu Rule," *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 64, No. 1 (Feb., 2005), 127-150.

[331] Riaz Hassan. "Religion, Society and the State in Pakistan: Pīrs and Politics." *Asian Survey,* Vol. 27, No. 5 (May, 1987), 554. For more on the role of Sufism in the spread of Islam and the consolidation of political authority through British rule see Sarah Ansari, *Sufi Saints and State Power: The Pīrs of Sind, 1843-1947* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); David Gilmartin, *Empire and Islam: Punjab and the Making of Pakistan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988) and "Religious Leadership and the Pakistan Movement", *Modern Asian Studies* 12, no.3 (1979), 485-517; Ian Talbot, *Pakistan: A Modern History* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

Nevertheless, it was initially through the establishment of Sufi *khanqahs* (a prayer house specifically designated for gatherings and rituals) that religious shrines would evolve into a politically powerful system in Pakistan. By the 12th century, Sufi masters (or *pīrs*) began arriving in the subcontinent and creating networks of devotees, converting local tribal leaders, winning their political allegiance, and establishing new forms of trade and exchange between the *khanqah* and its tribal allies. The maintenance of these networks was key to political, economic, and religious affairs in this region. The stability of this system led to the adoption of hereditary inheritance to institutionalize the political allegiances between the local population and the Sufi masters; the saint's piety and spirituality was now passed on to a designated successor amongst his descendants, cementing the political and social order of the community. Thus, as spiritual leadership changed from a learned process to a hereditary one, the Sufi *pīr* and his successors (often called *murshids* or *sajjada nashins*) became central to social order. The lineage of the *sajjada nashin* is a vital component to his authority, as most early Sufi *pīrs* identified themselves as *sayyids,* descended from the Prophet Muhammad. Upon the death of the *pīr*, the *khanqahs* would frequently double as shrines to these revered figures.

The shift to hereditary succession after the death of the Sufi saint led to the firming of the master-disciple (*pīr-sajjada nashin*) paradigm and of the political, spiritual, and economic links to the Sufi shrines through generations.[332] Due to their tremendous influence, political authorities sought to coopt the *khanqahs* and shrines to gain traction in the rural countryside, places where state authority located in urban centers

[332] See Adrian C. Mayer, "Pīr" and "Murshid": An Aspect of Religious Leadership in West Pakistan," *Middle Eastern Studies,* Vol. 3, No. 2 (Jan., 1967), 160-169.

was often unable to extend their rule. Land grants (*jagirs*) were given to maintain shrines and the economic status of their *sajjada nashins*. The shrines, in particular, were used and appropriated by the British colonial authorities, whose interest lay in formalizing a hereditary, land-based system that would establish a sedentary population of identifiable tribes and villages in the countryside. While the British attempted to maintain Enlightenment rhetoric of freedom and a hands-off approach in religious affairs, the centrality of the shrines and its *sajjada nashins* necessitated a mutually dependent relationship between the colonial structure and the influential hereditary descendants of the many *pīrs* of the subcontinent.[333] Under British rule, shrines, *pīrs,* and *sajjada nashins* received official patronage through land allocations in return for political support. *Pīrs* were designated "landed gentry" in the administration of Punjab Alienation of Land Bill of 1900.[334] British jurisdiction over these religious and charitable institutions led Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the future founder of Pakistan, to push forward the Mussalman Wakf Validating Act of 1913, which restored private ownership of the *waqf* (or religious endowment) from the British and "won him the heart of Muslims."[335]

Indeed, for the early ideologues of the Pakistan Movement, the prevalence and acceptance of shrine culture presented an important opportunity. The structure of the shrines – and the revenue deriving from ritual donations– could be integrated into the

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[333] Ewing. *Arguing Sainthood*.
[334] Hassan, "Religion, Society and the State in Pakistan," 559.
[335] S. Jamal Malik. "Waqf in Pakistan: Change in Traditional Institutions." *Die Welt des Islams,* New Series. Bd. 30, Nr. ¼ (1990), 65-66. This move, of course, had political benefits for Jinnah, as shrines predominated in the Sindh and the Punjab, and as landed gentry, many of the *pīrs* aligned themselves with the rival Unionist Party. Indeed, only after Jinnah's Muslim League won support of the powerful *pīrs* did it manage to secure its foothold in the Punjab – the region that "was to become the heart of Pakistani society and the state after 1947." Hassan, "Religion, Society and the State in Pakistan," 560.

infrastructure of the government of a nascent Pakistani state. After Pakistan's independence in 1947, the importance of these centers did not diminish. According to Javid Iqbal, the shrine could be harnessed as a center of Islamic order. Iqbal, the son of Allama Muhammad Iqbal – the moving ideological force behind the Pakistan Movement – was an influential Supreme Court judge and philosopher of Islamic political thought. He advocated for regulation of religious shrines that would emphasize saintly acts and not miracles, with government oversight to ensure that religious practice was properly channeled and would align with political interests – and capture revenue derived from religious endowments and donations.[336] The oversight of shrines, mosques, and religious endowments would be undertaken by the federalized Department of Auqaf, allowing the state a way to regulate lands and finances previously out of their purview.[337]

In line with Iqbal's conclusion, soon after his coup in 1958, Field Marshal Ayub Khan initiated a string of orders aimed at state building and social reform, including the Muslim Family Laws and decrees that would federalize shrines and religious property in Pakistan. The government issued the West Pakistan Waqf Properties Ordinance in 1959, and then a further detailed and similarly titled Ordinance on October 23rd, 1961; among its extensive clauses, the Ordinance pronounced, "The income from boxes placed at a shrine and offerings or subscriptions for charitable purposes shall be deemed to be Waqf

[336] Ewing, *Arguing Sainthood*, 254.
[337] The *waqf* (plural, *auqāf*) is a religious endowment in Islamic law, whether land, a trust investment, or any other kind of property. Though the broad guidelines governing *waqf* trusts are laid out in Sharī'a law, local regulations and interpretations have varied across Muslim societies. In many societies, *waqf* endowments evolved into a method to protect familial inheritance and retain these properties in private hands, rather than ceding control of wealth to become property of the ruler. Individuals could thus donate properties as *waqf* and name descendants as their trustees, guaranteeing that some portion of revenues remain with the family.

property."[338] Further laws were issued to apply to East Pakistan, and provincial assemblies began the process of creating regional Auqaf branches. These bills "sought to create a sense of unanimity between government policy direction, religious values, and the reformist ideals of the *pīrs*."[339] Coopting shrines into the state's new bureaucracies would give the Ayub government access to land that was previously held privately in perpetuity, allow it to regulate devotional practice on site and reframe saints as Islamic social reformers, and provide an important tool to combat the growing influence of the banned Jamaat-e-Islami and Islamist parties.

State officials – many whom had previously frequented shrines to garner political loyalty from its followers – were now centrally involved in shrine celebrations, along with cultural committees appointed to major shrines. In July 1961, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, then Minister of Commerce, Communications, and Industry inaugurated the anniversary celebrations at the shrine of famed saint-poet Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai, "under the auspices of the Bhit Shah Cultural Centre Committee," where "eminent scholars and poets from all over the country…read papers on various aspects of life, poetry, and philosophy of Shah Abdul Latif."[340] The same month, the Auqaf Department disclosed that it had set apart Rs. 12,000 for the anniversary (*urs*) in Lahore of Ali Hujweri Data Ganj Bakhsh, perhaps the most revered Sufi saint in Pakistan, with the Data Ganj Bakhsh Urs Sub-Committee and Auqaf Department publishing "a brochure containing the life-history and teachings of the saint and the outlines of the renovation and reconstruction

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[338] *Manual of Waqf laws; containing Punjab Waqf Properties Ordinance, 1979*. Lahore: Kausar Bros., 1980.
[339] Hassan, "Religion, Society and the State in Pakistan," 562.
[340] "Shah Latif Bhitai's death anniversary on July 28 and 29," *Dawn Newspaper*, July 5 1961.

plan for distribution among the visitors."[341] Books and pamphlets full of parables and sayings were jointly issued by the Auqaf Department with local shrine committees, coinciding with key political cycles. These shrine committees were composed of the hereditary descendants of the Sufi saints and local civil leaders, such as the Qalandar Cultural Society, set up in 1961 "for the purpose of collecting and completing the literature on the life and sayings of the great soofi-saint Hazrat Usman Marwandi, popularly known as Qalandar Shahbaz," another popular Sufi saint.[342]

With the federalization of shrines under the Auqaf department, successive governments of Ayub Khan (1958-69), Zulfikar Ali Bhutto (1973-77), and General Zia ul-Haq (1977-88) "maintained a policy toward the shrines that was consistent with their ideological goals," with Ayub Khan and Bhutto's governments emphasizing the welfare aspects of shrine centers and not the miraculous or fantastical biographical details.[343] Visit to and rhetorical use of Sufi *pīrs* and shrines also became a vital and contested tool for government officials, given the powerful resonance many of these names held with portions of the public. In 1976, Punjab Auqaf Minister Rana Iqbal Ahmad Khan, a member of Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party, noted that certain *ulama* "had repeatedly leveled frivolous charges against the People's Government in furtherance of their selfish political ends" in mosques and shrines, "undermining the sanctity of houses of prayer." Then, harnessing the ubiquitous appeal of these saints and shrines, he claimed Islam "has spread because of its sublime moral and spiritual values and not by force," citing the manner in which saints such as Data Ganj Bakhsh had brought a large number of non-

[341] "Arrangement for Urs of Data Ganj Bakhsh finalised," *Dawn Newspaper*, July 19, 1961.
[342] "Compilation of Sayings of Sehwan Soofi," *Dawn Newspaper*, September 28, 1961.
[343] Katherine Ewing. "The Politics of Sufism: Redefining the Saints of Pakistan." *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 42, No. 2 (Feb. 1983), 251.

Muslims into the fold of Islam by "efficiently preaching Islamic tenets and by the appeal of their own piety and noble character."[344] The control of shrines – and, indeed, the ability to frame the lives of saints whose shrines they controlled, provided a potent means for Ayub Khan and Bhutto to validate the Islamic nature of their political agendas.

The Auqaf (Federal Control) Act of 1976 further cemented the government's involvement in religious devotional practice, and as the Auqaf Department expanded by establishing provincial branches, so too did the publication of books to bolster the educational component of shrines, a goal that was urged by Javid Iqbal. Pamphlets about shrines highlighted the move away from the notion of *pīrs* as possessing divinely inspired mystical qualities and towards the daily life and deeds of these saints, who, as a collective body, "worked together to convert Pakistan as a nation to Islam," placing the emphasis on the 'good deeds' that Iqbal advocated.[345] The Presidential Ordinance of August 10th divested control of Auqaf properties from one central department to the now established provincial departments, amending the 1976 Act to state "the administration, control, management, and maintenance of all Waqf property situated in a Province…shall instead be transferred to the Government of that Province…"[346]

The trajectory, influence, and political relationship with Sufi shrines in Pakistan provides an instructive context for the milieu in which Bibi Pak Daman functioned. Because Sufi shrines had been more abundant and been an important factor in the political dynamics of Pakistan, the legal framework, political discourse, and scholarly focus on shrines have emphasized this lens in addressing

[344] "Opposition told to shun politics in mosques", *The Pakistan Times*, November 6, 1976.
[345] Ewing, *Arguing Sainthood*, 251.
[346] "Auqaf Provincial Subject from today," *The Pakistan Times*, April 14, 1976.

all religious sites – even those that are not primarily Sufi shrines. This was exacerbated by historiographical trends to locate and extract the local indigenous voice from hegemonic structures. However, this privileging of a kind of 'authentic' local experience ignores the critical supranational narratives and impulses that shape these spaces. In the case of Bibi Pak Daman, while it was subsumed under the same land and regulatory authorities concerned with Sufi shrines, its importance for the new Pakistani state cannot be understood without exploring the Shi'a structures and the emotional valence of such a site.

A Frontier Shrine in Urban Politics

It is within these legal and political frameworks that discourse around the construction and ritual practice of the Bibi Pak Daman shrine exists. It, too, is this context that highlights the unique interventions that the history and politics of Bibi Pak Daman has made. The shrine stands out on the national landscape, both in importance to the government and in the ideological debates projected onto the space of the shrine.

A close reading of the hagiographies and representations of Ruqayyah reveal the complex stakes that were at play at Bibi Pak Daman – the supranational appeal, the gender implications, the attempts to link her to the constructed Islamic past on the subcontinent, and the founding national myths. These narratives, tropes, and signifiers are critical because of the work they do, what they project, and how they directly affected the physical reality of the shrine. It was not merely control over the discourse surrounding Bibi Pak Daman that was contested, and these debates were not confined simply to the realm of meaning-making. Who Ruqayyah was and what Bibi Pak Daman meant had

direct implications on government regulation, jurisprudential ramifications, and control of resources. On the eve of the government's takeover, it was the second largest shrine in the Punjab in annual donations and revenue, and the stakes for all sides were high.[347]

Indeed, physical control of the shrine also entailed the ability to define the shrine, to determine the narratives and interpretations that emerge from it and normalize ritual surrounding it. This was a particularly potent issue, especially in regards to a shrine whose history remains ambiguous. Though the government and devotees had a vested interest in displaying the international importance and nationalist implications of Bibi Pak Daman, the shrine was a deeply contentious space, and debates over the history of the shrine revealed the deep divisions that were present in Pakistani society; indeed, its very ambiguity allowed it to take on multiple valences, serving as a site on which distrust of government authority in religious practice, land disputes, communal tensions, and rhetoric about 'proper' religious rituals are mapped.

Though Ruqayyah was said to have arrived in Lahore near the end of the 7th century, according to the Auqaf Department's official publications, the first verifiable written reference to a land deed of Bibi Pak Daman was in 1856, when a local census record noted a combined ownership of a large tract of land on which the shrine was located.[348] From the first rudimentary constructions around the site, a network of self-proclaimed *sajjada nashins* and surrounding residents had slowly encroached and exerted control over the shrine, forming a de facto administration that ruled the shrine as communal property. Tracts of land were passed down through generations as *waqf*

[347] Field notes, interview with Mian Muhammad Syed, Head of Auqaf Department, Bibi Pak Daman, January 3, 2011, Lahore.
[348] Ghaffir Shehzad. *Hazrat Bibi Pak Daman*, 2nd ed. (Lahore: Department of Religious Affairs and Auqaf, Punjab, January 2005), *Hazrat Bibi Pak Daman,* 12.

property, complicating questions of ownership with Islamic precedence and civil law. In 1924-25, the British administration allowed a more detailed demarcation of land, and the individual plot for Bibi Pak Daman was defined.[349] While pilgrims from all over Pakistan regularly visited the shrine, the administration and upkeep of the shrine had been a localized affair. The shrine's *sajjada nashins* intervened in disputes onsite, using their influence amongst the community to regulate activities on site and maintain a status quo. While little work was done to expand or increase activities at the site, prominent Shi'a families in Lahore had endowed Bibi Pak Daman with gifts to aid pilgrims at the shrine. Sayyeda Fakhra Begum, the daughter of Syed Maratib Ali Shah, a prominent Shi'a businessman and philanthropist, helped repair the rundown veranda at Bibi Pak Daman, so that pilgrims could "continue to use the shrine with peace and ease."[350]

On September 9th, 1967, the government took control of the administration of Bibi Pak Daman and the surrounding land through the authority of the West Pakistan Waqf Properties Ordinance of 1961, ending centuries of ambiguity over the control and ownership of the shrine. The shrine was registered as a Sunni shrine, likely because over the centuries Sufi *sajjada nashins* in the surrounding environs had claimed their descent from Ruqayyah and thus been the recipients of all shrine donations and allocated funds.[351] Registering the shrine as a Sunni shrine was in effect de facto recognition and acceptance of these men as caretakers of the shrine, subsuming their authority and informal structure

[349] Letter to S.P Officer, Qila Gujjar Singh, Lahore Police District re: concerned citizens complaint [sic], July 12, 1956. Punjab Archives, Lahore, Pakistan.
[350] Muhammad Bakhsh Shah Qureshi, *Tarikh-e-Bibian Pak Daman (SA)*, 135.
[351] While the term *sajjada nashin* is more prevalent in the South Asian context, the term *mutawalli* is also used interchangeably. While *sajjada nashins* claim a spiritual authority, traditionally a *mutawalli* is the caretaker of the shrine, the hereditary descendant of the owner of the *waqf* property.

into the new order. While the federalization of the shrine was indeed a dramatic break, bringing the state for the first time into such close proximity, the expressed interest of the government was not to impede or disrupt existing systems. Hence, registering the shrine as a Sunni site was a nod to the claims and facts on the ground, albeit dubious in origin. This classification would nevertheless have important ramifications for the governance and politics of the shrine.

The federalization notification was published in the West Pakistan Gazette, acknowledging that the Chief Administrator of Auqaf had "taken over and assumed the administration control, management, and maintenance of the Shrine", including the attached mosque and graveyard.[352] Simultaneous with the publishing of notification 1(71)-Auqaf/63, Muhammad Asghar, the Assistant Manager of Auqaf, Lahore Central District, was dispatched to the shrine to take possession of Bibi Pak Daman. The process was a remarkable marshaling of the state's nascent bureaucratic capacity, with meticulous attention given to the site now under the government's purview. His assessment provided minute detail on the layout and state of affairs at the shrine as the government entered the space. He first assured the Chief Administrator that all surveying was carried out with "full respect to the ladies who reside at the shrine and specially [sic] the veiling of women, in reference to your requests."[353] Immediately, then, there is an acknowledgement of the particularity of Bibi Pak Daman – the predominance of female visitors to the shrine and the pious ancestry of Ruqayyah and her family would have to be

[352] Order Notification from M. Masood, C.S.P, Chief Administrator of Auqaf, West Pakistan. *No.1(71)-Auqaf/63*, Sept. 9, 1967. Issued by Office of the Chief Administrator of Auqaf, West Pakistan, Lahore. General Records of Darbar Hazrat Bibi Pak Daman, Lahore.
[353] Letter from S. Muhammad Asghar, Assistant Manager Auqaf, Central Zone Sector II, Lahore to Chief Administrator Auqaf, Central Zone, Lahore *[trans]* Sept. 9, 1967. General Records of Darbar Hazrat Bibi Pak Daman, Lahore.

reconciled with a male-dominated state authority inserting itself into the public space of the shrine. This question of the gendered nature of the shrine would repeatedly feature in correspondence between government officials, pilgrims, and local residents, as Bibi Pak Daman provided challenges unlike any other site in Pakistan.

Asghar then continued with his assessment for the Chief Administrator of Auqaf, providing a full account of the scene at the official handover from the *sajjada nashins* (known locally as *gaddi nashins*) to government personnel. "At this darbar, there are 4 collection boxes, on which we put our own locks and sealed them and the list of present property was prepared," he noted.[354] The locking of the donation boxes was an unmistakable assertion of a new order at the shrine, one that suddenly changed the very structure of daily observances, as all pilgrims who visited the shrine would typically offer a small monetary offering in return for prayers answered and blessing. Those voluntary charity funds (or *sadaqa*) were previously funneled through the self-appointed *mutawalli* and then distributed at their discretion for religious ceremonies and expenses at the shrine. There were 8 *mutawalli* families that claimed trusteeship of the shrine, Asghar explained, "and take weekly turns taking responsibility for the shrine and in their own turns they keep taking their cut from the cash boxes, which cannot continue. The cash boxes are in 4 different locations, for which is now needed one caretaker and one guard for the evening to safeguard the funds. There is only one power meter, registered in the name of Malik Abdul Karim, *sajjada nashin,* who uses it as suits him."[355] These observations suggest the self-policing nature of the *sajjada nashin* system at Bibi Pak

[354] *ibid,* Letter from S. Muhammad Asghar, Sept. 9, 1967.
[355] *ibid,* Letter from S. Muhammad Asghar, Sept. 9, 1967.

Daman before the state took control. These families shared informal responsibilities at their convenience and, most critically, all the funds collected from devotees.

Though the Auqaf Department was seizing control of the physical resources and presenting itself as the new authority at the site, henceforth responsible for implementing new policies and arbitrating all disputes, the manager proceeded to make lengthy recommendations for how the government must manage the immediate transition so as not to interrupt the key ongoing rituals at the shrine. Asghar's specific observations on the *urs* and the rituals and charitable feasts (*langar*) that accompanied it reflect the almost scientific collection of institutional knowledge and the bureaucratization of the federal government – a focus of the Ayub regime.[356] The expenses had been previously borne by the *mutawalli* families, though the state would now need a full understanding and accounting of those rituals. "The blessed *urs* is going to be on the 6th/7th of *Jamadi-ul-Sani* [sic] and the distribution of the *langar* must be arranged for the 7th evening and 8th morning," he advised. "On the 6th *Jamadi-ul-Sani* [sic]…the shrine is cleansed and bathed to distribute small pots of sweet rice on the 6th evening. On the 7th after Ishā there is Qurān reading and the distribution of *langar* and then *qawwali* is recited. On the 8th, from

[356] Ayub Khan believed in an essentially reformist vision of Islam, focusing on economic development and the need "to liberate the spirit of religion from the cobwebs of superstition and stagnation which surround it and move forward under the forces of modern science and technology." Ayub Khan quoted in John Esposito, "Islam: Ideology and Politics in Pakistan," in Ali Banuazizi and Myron Weiner, eds., *The State, Religion, and Ethnic Politics* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1986), 336.The bureaucratization of religion was, of course, not a process isolated to Pakistan. During the 1960s in Iran, key reform movements supported by the government highlighted the state penetration of religious institutions under the Pahlavi regime. The sponsoring of rational reform movements (including land reform) to gain influence in a sector previously removed from government control proved an instructive one for Ayub's regime. For more on Iran see Shahrough Akhavi, *Religion and Politics in Contemporary Iran: Clergy-State relations in the Pahlavī Period* (New York: State University of New York, 1980); Nikki Keddie, *Roots of Revolution: An Interpretive History of Modern Iran* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981).

11 AM to 12:30: *naat khani* continues, then reciting and finishing of Qurān, then *langar*." As the government was resuming the responsibility and financing to continue this ritual, he reminded the Chief Administrator of Auqaf that "at the end of the *urs*, *dupattas* are distributed to the men and women who recite *milād*."[357] The distribution of gifts was a key part of the ritual process. Those who recited the *milād*, or recitations of praise for the Prophet and his family, were gifted a token that symbolically recalled the importance of veiling in Ruqayyah's story, a unique dimension to the rituals at Bibi Pak Daman.

In a follow-up letter sent a few days later, Asghar described his subsequent trip on September 12th to the shrine to order necessary arrangements and account for all property now under the authority of the Auqaf Department. In this letter, he acknowledged that "because there has been a takeover and there are shops and homes in that area…Auqaf will decide what the rentals will be so that the government can start collecting [funds]."[358] Indeed, the assertive state and its new bureaucracies indicated it would not be an unobtrusive presence at the shrine. The letters between Auqaf officials reveal an attempt to maintain the essence of ritual at the shrine, especially in regards to female devotionalism and its unique relationship to Ruqayyah, while they injected themselves into the management and formalized structure at the shrine.

This balancing act was, of course, a tenuous one. Despite the professed desire to ensure a smooth transition, Auqaf officials quickly acted to formulate and disseminate

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[357] Memorandum of Authority. S. Muhammad Asghar, Assistant Manager Auqaf, Central Zone Sector II, Lahore to Chief Administrator Auqaf and SPO Police, Central Zone. [*trans*] Sept. 9, 1967. General Records of Darbar Hazrat Bibi Pak Daman, Lahore. The *dupatta* is a long scarf often used to cover a woman's head and seen as a symbol of modesty in South Asian culture.
[358] Letter from S. Muhammad Asghar, Assistant Manager Auqaf, Central Zone Sector II, Lahore, to Chief Administrator Auqaf, Central Zone. Memo No. 204-HMLW-1/T.O/67. *[trans.]* Sept. 14, 1967. General Records of Darbar Hazrat Bibi Pak Daman, Lahore.

new rules of conduct in an attempt to exert control and subvert any rival authorities. Because of the long history and complex narratives associated with the shrine and the lack of clear familial descent, over the course of centuries both informal and formal systems of patronage and authority had emerged. From the government's perspective, these *mutawalli* families had simply encroached on the land of the shrine over centuries and usurped funds and authority; unlike other shrines, the absence of an unbroken, verifiable chain of descent of *sajjada nashins* made any claims appear dubious. As such, the Auqaf officials rapidly mobilized to observe and respond to the situation on the ground in a series of instruction letters and official orders. In a letter from Abdul Majid, the Administrator Auqaf, Central Zone, to the same Assistant Manager Muhammad Asghar, concerns about arrangements that had continued at the shrine beyond the control of the Auqaf department were discussed. "It has been brought to my notice," he stated, "that the caretaker Mastana sits as the Gaddi of H. Bibian Pakdaman and handles money from the devotees for putting in the cash-boxes. This practice is very much objectionable and should not be allowed to continue any longer." Information was also collected from pilgrims at the site, as he continued, "It was also reported that he collects the *burqas* offered at the shrine by the lady visitors and sells them in the market. All the offerings received, of whatever kind it may be, belongs to Auqaf Department and it should be disposed of by the Asst. Manager concerned."[359]

The concern over informal business arrangements is clear in this exchange. In the absence of officially regulated structures, patronage agreements, mutually beneficial

[359] Letter from Capt. Abdul Majid, PCS Administrator of Auqaf, Central Zone, Lahore, to S. Muhammad Asghar, Assistant Manager, Sector II, Lahore. Memo No. ACZ-9-2(1)-104/67/5874. Nov. 25, 1967. General Records of Darbar Hazrat Bibi Pak Daman, Lahore.

financial exchanges, and links between caretakers and bazaar shopkeepers flourished. Because of the centrality of veiling and piety in Ruqayyah's narrative and her prayer to deliver her from the eyes of nonbelievers, devotees at Bibi Pak Daman often donated *chadors* or *dupattas* in exchange for the granting of prayers. Before the government's intervention at the shrine, these were collected by the attendants, many who subsisted on the donations and extra funds procured at the shrine, and resold in the bazaar. The Auqaf Department's demands to eliminate these practices were thus imposed to the attendants now in their employ. The attendants who served in the ladies section of Bibi Pak Daman were issued strict instructions to list all donated *chadors,* cash, or expensive items by date, which could no longer be passed on to other pilgrims at their discretion. Cash could not be accepted by hand and had to go directly into locked cash boxes that were watched by Auqaf managers. Most critically, however, was the demand conveyed to the female attendant that no male attendants or pilgrims were to be allowed to sit near the shrine. Hagiographies and common narratives about Ruqayyah's life emphasize the purity of her veiling – so much so that even after the ground opened and delivered them from prying eyes, even the men of the enemy Hindu Raj would not desecrate the sacred space by coming near it. In deference to her lineage, most accounts claim that men should avoid the inner areas of the shrine.[360] As time passed, however, this had become lax, with men freely sharing the space of the shrine and the male *sajjada nashins* given full access. The government's position on this was notable, with the Auqaf Manager's strict warning that "the above instructions must be followed strictly, and if there are any complaints from

[360] Khaki, *Bibian Pak Daman,* 33.

our pilgrims you will be fired from the job."[361] In fact, this injunction was not just a passing reminder – it was reinforced again months later, when additional cash boxes were placed on the periphery of the shrine's interior so that men would not pass near the grave.[362] This issue of the use and division of space at the shrine was not yet settled.

These stricter regulations did not simply apply to streamlining rituals and donations at the shrine. The Auqaf takeover removed large swaths of land from private ownership into government-controlled *waqf* property, the boundaries of which encompassed historic Bibi Pak Daman, despite decades of urban sprawl and encroachment. The government was quick to develop a rent schedule and allocate proceeds from rent collected towards the shrine's expenses, quickly drafting a budget for June 1968. The same attention was marshaled to verify land deeds; correspondences reflect the assertiveness of the new state's federal bureaucracies, determined to redefine the social order. The state was now at the doorsteps of pilgrims and shopkeepers, as Assistant Manager Asghar's update to the Auqaf Administrator of Lahore reassured, "Those who were not paying rent to the *mutawalli* will be investigated" and noted that "some current construction is illegal and must be demolished immediately."[363]

Yet for all the apparent speed in implementation in rent collection and land consolidation, this was a negotiated process, carried out incrementally as the government faced resistance from local residents and shrine leaders. While the federalization of all

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[361] Letter from Office of Manager of Auqaf to Ghulam Fatima, Ladies Attendant, Darbar Bibi Pak Daman. Memo No. 301/AMLW-II/67. *[trans.]* Dec. 4, 1967. General Records of Darbar Hazrat Bibi Pak Daman, Lahore.
[362] Letter from S. Muhammad Asghar, Assistant Manager, Auqaf, Central Zone, Section II to Office of Administrator Auqaf, Central Zone, Lahore. Query No. 5283. *[trans.]* Dec. 12, 1967. General Records of Darbar Hazrat Bibi Pak Daman, Lahore.
[363] *ibid,* Query No. 5283. *[trans.]* Dec. 12, 1967.

waqf property was a critical state building enterprise for a new nation struggling to define a national identity, shows of authority by the state were challenged on the ground. The everyday resistance to the nation-building project was evident at Bibi Pak Daman, where the unique nature of the shrine exacerbated divided loyalties. In response to the takeover notification on September 9th, 1967, surrounding landowners immediately sent land claims to the Auqaf Department and petitioned the courts, contesting in particular the government's right to control the surrounding shops, graveyard, and a mosque on site. Indeed, the nature and history of Bibi Pak Daman made these land disputes even more complex than the takeover of other shrines around Pakistan. The government claimed that the shrine itself was ostensibly situated on all *waqf* property established by Akbar, erasing centuries in between and connecting laws from the height of Mughal rule with the establishment of the Pakistani state. This *waqf* was certainly not enforced, and over the centuries families had moved into the surrounding environs of Qila Gujjar Singh, passing land deeds on through generations and passing on in *waqf* certain portions of their holdings.

In his article "Endowing Family," Beshara Doumani highlights the extensive use of *waqf* endowments in Tripoli and Nablus, arguing that the *waqf* is a more permissible, flexible system of inheritance. *Waqf* endowments "created the largest space of maneuvering by individuals who wished to express their personal preferences and desires when it comes to the devolution of property," allowing them to create a long-term social

safety net for family and protect against unexpected upheavals or new governments.[364] The tumultuous history of partition, the establishment of a new state based on Islamic principles and a civil code, and the subsequent federalization of *waqf* properties created just that uncertainty. On a broader level, those who had held those properties as private family holdings were now forced to pay an additional layer of government taxes, and the takeover of land was met with resistance. Residents and landowners around Bibi Pak Daman mobilized to assemble documentation that would prove inheritance and exclude their land from what constituted essential shrine property. Far less confusion surrounded larger Sufi shrines, as hereditary inheritance was more established and the land that shrines were built on had remained communal property, governed by shrine committees recognized by British and then Pakistani officials.

At Bibi Pak Daman, rather than tacitly accept the Auqaf takeover, residents immediately took action to get their lands released from Auqaf control. They gathered what documentation they had available – though much had been conducted through informal tenders and exchange systems. Many of these sales were conducted pre-independence, and with new laws dictating land rights the government was forced to adopt creative solutions to these disputes. In these interactions between residents and government and judicial officials, one discovers the responsive nature of the shrine authorities in the early years of the federalization project, a mirror of the Sayyeda Zaynab. Just days after the Auqaf Department secured the land around Bibi Pak Daman, a letter and supporting documents was sent from a Mahmud Akhtar, on behalf of his

[364] Beshara Doumani, "Endowing Family: Waqf, Property Devolution, and Gender in Greater Syria, 1800 to 1860." *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 40, No.1 (Jan. 1998), 3-41.

widowed sisters, requesting a specific plot be released. For these women, the loss of income and stability found in land ownership had an immediate impact. He argued, "Since January 1933-34, this lot number 2417…has been in the name of our father Muhammad Din son of Maula Bakhsh. This right was confirmed in 1939 in the court of lower judge Abdul Wahid." On September 14th, 1967, however, this lot was taken into the control of the Auqaf Department. Akhtar continued with his appeal. "Dear Sir, any notice or order issued on this lot should be issued in my name. This graveyard is my ancestral property and there is no connection to Bibi Pak Damanan and I still have control over this property."[365] This appeal would become a common theme in these land requests. Petitioners learned that the most successful tactic was not to contest the Auqaf Department's federalization notification writ large, nor did they debate the right to the shrine itself. Instead, petitions from local residents argued that their specific plots were not associated with the religious purposes of Bibi Pak Daman.

Many of these appeals were then filed in Lahore's lower courts, as residents joined together in collective action to contest the state's new regulations. The resulting judgment was that apart from the main shrine and portions of the attached graveyard – land that was directly connected to shrine governance and regulating the proper administration of resources – the surrounding land could not be claimed for Auqaf control under government ordinances. On December 15th, 1967, the excluded land was released back into private ownership – a process that mirrored legal challenges to the Auqaf ordinances that took place across Pakistan after the nationalization decrees were

[365] Letter from Mahmud Akhtar son of Muhammid Din, et all to Administrator, Auqaf Board, Lahore. *[trans.]* Sept. 17, 1967. General Records of Darbar Hazrat Bibi Pak Daman, Lahore.

issued.[366] These debates about the state's authority and its active stance on social issues were played out in these interactions between residents and Auqaf officials, as petitioners adopted the most effective defenses of their property. In many cases they challenged the government with competing authority structures or ways of understanding inheritance – religious edicts, legal judgments from courts, pre-partition land laws still written into the civil code. Bibi Pak Daman was the site onto which all these claims were mapped.

Complicating the matter further at Bibi Pak Daman, however, was that the mix of Shi'a and Sunni *waqf* properties and stipulations created an additional layer to civil proceedings over registered land deeds. Because Bibi Pak Daman was taken over and registered by the Auqaf Department as a Sunni shrine, despite the widely held belief that Ruqayyah bint 'Ali was buried there, Auqaf control and regulations violated the terms of many Shi'a *waqf* properties. Many Shi'a landowners around the shrine had set up businesses and private educational services that were consciously linked to Bibi Pak Daman, with land deeds that stipulated their property could only be used by *sayyids* (or descendants from the Prophet's family). Some Shi'a families argued that their families had settled at Bibi Pak Daman for the sole purpose of being close to Ruqayyah. Petitioners had argued that particular plots were "their private and personal property, which they inherited from their forfathers [sic]."[367] To calm these particular tensions, Auqaf officials were more easily convinced to de-notify those lands and return to private ownership. Those residents, it was argued, were not undertaking any activities that would

[366] "Waqf Ordinances: High Court Allows Government Appeals." *Dawn Newspaper*. October 19, 1961.

[367] To Chief Administrator of Auqaf, West Pakistan. Petition for the Deletion of Property forming Khasra No. 4534. Oct. 28, 1967. General Records of Darbar Hazrat Bibi Pak Daman, Lahore. See also Letter from Chief Administrator of Auqaf, West Pakistan to Administrator of Auqaf, Central Zone, Lahore. Oct. 25, 1967. General Records of Darbar Hazrat Bibi Pak Daman, Lahore.

undermine the administration or spirit of Bibi Pak Daman and were remanded their property and refund vouchers for taxes collected.[368]

Part of the reasoning for the Auqaf takeover was to reclaim the entirety of 'historic' Bibi Pak Daman, which had fallen out of public – and profitable – use through decades of private construction and encroachment. Plots had been passed on as personal inheritance, becoming centers of family life and business for years. In this context, the task for Auqaf officials to notify and retain the land was an uphill battle. Yet in some cases, the government's takeover was welcomed as a way to protect the territorial integrity of the shrine. One particular case embodied the unique circumstances at Bibi Pak Daman. In 1956, before the state takeover of Bibi Pak Daman, a woman named Sayyida Muhammad Fatima, a widow and local resident, registered her property as *waqf* lands. The *waqf-nama* described clearly what she intended for the land: her late husband had bequeathed a piece of land in the name of Husayn ibn 'Ali and Ruqayyah bint 'Ali – a common practice amongst Shi'a Muslims. He had purchased the plot with the intent of donating it to be used for pilgrims who visited Bibi Pak Daman. Sayyid Muhammad Fatima then forsook all personal legal claims to it. Her husband had named her the executor of this *waqf*, but she believed that her decision to remain veiled would impede her ability to implement his wishes. As such, she had authorized a family representative, Jaffer Ali Muhammad Ali wald Ibrahim, "to collect contributions and build a structure [on this land] for the purpose of *majlis-e-Husayn, Sayyid-e-Shuhada*, beloved brother of

[368] Notification to be Published in the West Pakistan Extra Ordinary Gazette: Office of the Chief Administrator of Auqaf, West Pakistan. July 27, 1968. General Records of Darbar Hazrat Bibi Pak Daman, Lahore. See also Memo from Administrator of Auqaf, Central Zone, to Assistant Manager, Waqf Properties Sector V Lahore. Memo No. ACZ-1(1)-104/67/3748. Sept. 30, 1968. General Records of Darbar Hazrat Bibi Pak Daman, Lahore.

Ruqayyah bint Ali."[369] While the land had been bought specifically for the purpose of constructing the center, to her chagrin, however, Jaffer Ali had been unable to do so. She could not oversee the work herself because she was veiled, but was mindful that the terms of her husband's will had to be executed. Therefore, she declared, "Of my own accord, within my full senses and in sane mind, through this document I donate this land to Madrasa Jamiat al-Muntazar, Lahore so that its committee will assume construction of the center." Because she was unable to write the terms of the *waqf*, her fingerprint was recorded in the presence of male witnesses to verify the *waqf* stipulations.

The Jamiat al-Muntazar Trust had been established in 1954 with the goal of creating the preeminent religious institute for the Shi'as of Pakistan, at a time where there was only one other Shi'a *madrasa* in the country. Thus, the donation of land to create another outpost close to Bibi Pak Daman was a significant bequest. However, Sayyida Muhammad Fatima's *waqf* cautioned, "Jamiat Muntazar will have the full authority to construct the center and it will be mandatory to have 10 *majālis* during the first 10 days of Muharram, and throughout the year all Shi'a community will have the right to hold *majālis* at any time other than school hours. If ever this organization is shut down, this property that I have given as *waqf* will remain used in the name of Imam Hussain and our Shi'a will have the right to use it as a religious center and *imambargah*."[370] The terms of this *waqf* were exceptionally clear – she intended for her land near the shrine of Bibi Ruqayyah to be devoted completely to learning, remembrance of Husayn and Karbala,

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[369] Waqf-nama of Sayyeda Muhammad Fatima Zawj Khan Bahadur Niaz Qutb. Witnessed Jan. 30, 1956. Document 549 file 3114 pg 58/62. Registered Feb. 13, 1956. Office of the Sub-Registrar. Records of Bibi Pak Daman Trust via Asma Mamdot, Chairman, MPA National Assembly.

[370] Waqf-nama of Sayyeda Muhammad Fatima Zawj Khan Bahadur Niaz Qutb, Feb. 13, 1956

and use by Shi'a pilgrims in perpetuity. Even if the lands were removed from the control of Jamiat al-Muntazar, they were to remain open to the Shi'a pilgrims at Bibi Pak Daman to use in the service of Ruqayyah and Husayn.

Over a decade later, however, the trustees of Jamiat al-Muntazar were still attempting to fulfill the terms of the bequest at Bibi Pak Daman. There had proven to be significant challenges and resistance in the establishment of the school itself, both bureaucratic and ideological. It was unable to expand and effectively run another center at Bibi Pak Daman on its own. As a result, the principle of Jamiat al-Muntazar, the widely respected Shi'a religious leader Maulana Sayyid Safdar Hussain, had delegated the collection of funds and rents, expansion of the construction, and conduct of legal proceedings to the president of a local Shi'a organization.[371] The Trust had hoped that a local organization around Bibi Pak Daman could effectively carry out the *waqf* stipulations. Yet the difficulties remained. The residents around Bibi Pak Daman were largely Sunni, and Shi'a organizations were often at a disadvantage in collecting donations and mounting legal challenges. Importantly, the lack of effective mobilization displayed that the Shi'a community had not yet coalesced around a wholly unified sectarian identity.

As a result, Jamiat al-Muntazar was forced to pass the *waqf* on to another more prominent local organization, albeit one oriented towards Sunni theology. In 1971, the

[371] Public Letter of Authority from Maulana Sayyid Safdar Hussain, Chair, Jamiat al-Muntazir to Muhammad Bakhsh Sahib Qureshi, President, Anjuman-e-Jafariyya, Bibi Pak Daman, Lahore. April 30, 1970. Records of Bibi Pak Daman Trust via Asma Mamdot, Chairman, MPA National Assembly. Sayyid Safdar Hussain was a renowned Shi'a Islamic jurist and philosopher in Pakistan. He first translated Imam Khomeini's pre-revolutionary works into Urdu – as well as many important works by lead Shi'a jurists –and corresponded frequently with Khomeini through the end of his life. It was through his extensive work Sayyid Safdar Hussain's work that a network of Shi'a *madrasas* was established throughout Pakistan through the 1980s.

managing trustee of Jamiat al-Muntazar, Seht Nawazish Ali, officially transferred all land rights to the Majlis Tanzīm ul-Islam. The Majlis Tanzīm ul-Islam was in fact an offshoot of the more orthodox Islamic Deobandi school and founded by a prominent Pakistani Islamic theologian named Israr Ahmed. At the time, however, they accepted the terms of the *waqf-nama*. Seht Nawazish Ali counseled, "Sayyida Muhammad Fatima gave this land as waqf to Imam Husayn. We have appointed the *mutawalli* for the land and gave him the authority to construct a suitable building and make arrangements throughout the year for the religious education of students and during Muharram conduct *majlis*…We forsake all rights so that Majlis-e-Tanzīm ul-Islam can construct and fulfill her wishes."[372] Two months later, it was bought by a private citizen and turned into a Sunni mosque.

Because of this complicated arrangement, the land that had been originally bequeathed for pilgrims to Bibi Pak Daman to use as a center of Shi'a commemoration fell out of their hands. In 1972, a local Shi'a scholar who lived close to Bibi Pak Daman wrote a letter to Maulana Sayyid Safdar Hussain, requesting that he "appeal to Auqaf to notify this plot and return to the *zā'ireen* (pilgrims) of Sayyida Ruqayyah."[373] The government's takeover was viewed as a way for this land to return to its original purpose, though it fell outside the boundaries of the Auqaf Department's notification schedule. Safdar Hussain responded to the concerned *imam* weeks later with brief explanation: "At this time, [they] believe it impossible. We must have faith that this is what Allah

[372] Document of Transfer of Rights, Seht Nawazish Ali, Managing Director, Jamiat al- Muntazar, Witnessed by Professor Muhammad Sadiq Qureshi. Registry Amendment 549, file 3114, pg. 58-62 [*trans*.] April 24, 1971. Records of Bibi Pak Daman Trust via Asma Mamdot, Chairman, MPA National Assembly.
[373] Letter from Sayyid Zeeshan Haider. September 21, 1972. Archive of the Personal Papers of Allama Sayyid Safdar Hussain. Jamiat ul-Muntazar, Model Town, Lahore.

willed."[374] The government, it seemed, was well aware of the fragility of the situation at Bibi Pak Daman and remained conscious of how they mediated and projected authority on the physical space of the shrine.

Sectarianism Emerges

The government's wariness of the charged nature of Bibi Pak Daman was not without reason. The physical space of the shrine was constrained, often overflowing with pilgrims, and the spiritual investments and political implications remained potent. There were real divides in historical and religious perspectives between various groups at the shrine, but they had been mediated on an individual and community level; the state's entrance into the space added another actor to the complicated mix of *mutawalli* families, *sajjada nashins*, local residents, pilgrims, religious authorities, business interests, and political leaders. However, if the earlier debates at the shrine brought out questions about the state's authority and the contours of its participation in religious life, the Auqaf takeover would lead to the escalation of conflict between Sunni and Shi'a pilgrims and leaders and, ultimately, the creation of sectarianism at the shrine.

The government's initial caution in the takeover of the shrine was not immediately and solely seen through a sectarian lens. Certainly, other factors and affiliations were of equal importance at Bibi Pak Daman. The initial response to the Auqaf takeover had been to come together under individual, familial, or business interests. Pilgrims and residents were engaging as individuals but had not consistently

[374] Record of response: Allamah Sayyed Safdar Hussain to *Imam* Haider. November 3, 1972. Archive of the Personal Papers of Allama Sayyid Safdar Hussain. Jamiat ul-Muntazar, Model Town, Lahore.

mobilized as a collective and assertive Shi'a community. Yet from the beginning, the Auqaf administrators seemed preemptively alert to any potential discord among the Shi'a community, likely influenced by the changing political climate on a national scale. From the Chief Administrator of Auqaf of West Pakistan himself came the directive that Auqaf officials at Bibi Pak Daman were required to "adopt a suitable line of action to which all the parties might be agreeable. He further desired that Shi'a Leaders should be taken into confidence" in all matters.[375] On a broader scale, while Field Marshall Ayub's government had tried to clamp down on civil discord by suppressing right-wing religious parties, sectarian tensions had increased in recent years, making the state sensitive to signs of discord. In 1963, two separate attacks on Shi'a Muslims raised the specter of a growing spiral of sectarian retaliation. In response, the government had attempted to persuade Shi'as to restrict Muharram processions, creating new impediments to obtaining permits for these public displays. Prominent Shi'a *ulema* had protested these restrictions, demanding at the All-Pakistan Shi'a *Ulema* Convention that the government provide adequate security of public rituals and for the self-administration of Shi'a trusts, shrines, and *waqf* properties.[376] Nevertheless, this language of restriction for the good of public safety and sectarian protection would thus be echoed in the guidelines put forth after the government's takeover at Bibi Pak Daman, another space that had a clear potential for conflict over the public use of space.

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[375] Affairs at the shrine of Hazrat Bibianpakdamanan Sahiba, attn.: Administrator of Auqaf, Central Zone. Memo No. ACZ-9-2(1)-104/68/3098. 25th March 1968. General Records of Darbar Hazrat Bibi Pak Daman, Lahore.

[376] Hassan Abbas, "Shi'ism and Sectarian Conflict in Pakistan: Identity Politics, Iranian Influence, and Tit-for-Tat Violence."

Much recent scholarship has focused on denaturalizing the concept of sectarianism and highlighting instead the social and political conditions under which the category 'sectarian' becomes a useful mode of analysis and a signifier of behavior.[377] How sectarianism is produced and activated is a result of changing facts on the ground, creating new frameworks for organizing behavior. In the case of Bibi Pak Daman, the entrance of the government into shrine affairs in fact constructed the conditions for an 'official' sectarianism, reinforced by the government's desire to retain order in a chaotic urban space. In turn, for devotees, sectarian claims provided an effective language for articulating a range of concerns – land rights, questions of gender, and religious rituals, in the tumultuous political context of the 1970s. The emergence of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) in 1967, led by the charismatic Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, created a new horizon of possibilities for Shi'as to understand themselves in the political arena. Bhutto was a secular Shi'a, as were many amongst its leadership ranks, and the PPP brought in Shi'a supporters who were previously inactive in the political sphere. As Hamid Dabashi argued in his recent work *Shi'ism,* "sectarian thinking in and out of Muslim communities is always a matter of external political manipulation of internally dormant doctrines."[378] Shi'ism, he believed, was a religion of protest; its narratives and doctrines have historically been galvanized into a sectarian framework only in the face of challenges to its political and legal authority. The combination of select outbursts of religious violence, new Shi'a leadership in the political and clerical classes, and the state's attempt to

[377] For more on the subcontinent, see Harjot Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries: Culture, Identity, and Diversity in the Sikh Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); Christopher Bayly, *Origins of Nationality in South Asia: Patriotism and Ethical Government in the making of Modern India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).
[378] Dabashi, *Shi'ism: A Religion of Protest*, 303.

regulate religious behavior would more broadly facilitate new ways of understanding what 'being Shi'a' meant.

This changing power dynamics would become clear at Bibi Pak Daman. The most significant conflict that emerged was regarding the control of the *masjid* attached to Bibi Pak Daman and religious ornamentation of the shrine itself. The competing Sunni and Shi'a interpretations of Bibi Pak Daman would be marshaled to influence these disputes. The site, of course, was a place of worship for a broad swath of the population. While many Sunnis questioned Bibi Ruqayyah's history, many prayed at the shrine with little engagement in the controversies over their identities. Those that accepted the story about Ruqayyah did so in a more localized context, rarely linking her presence to the larger Shi'i narrative trajectory. Shi'i hagiographies, however, revealed more at stake in their commitment to the story of Ruqayyah's arrival in Pakistan, as Bibi Pak Daman became enmeshed in their validation and self-identity as a besieged community. Indeed, the denial of Ruqayyah's presence became interpreted as yet another slight in their history, as those who claimed that it was not Bibi Ruqayyah were viewed as limiting the tragedies of the family of the Prophet.[379] Thus, the claim that the graves may have belonged instead to the daughters of the saint Syed Ahmad Tokhta was internalized as a challenge to Shi'i doctrine itself, giving the two differing narratives extra weight.

The takeover of the shrine, according to communication between Auqaf officials, gave rise to these sectarian cleavages, forcing the government to become a reluctant arbitrator in a volatile situation. As part of their initial information gathering, Muhammad Asghar and other local Auqaf officials had observed the average prayer times of different

[379] Khaki, *Bibian Pak Daman,* 14.

devotees and formalized prayer timings to avoid any confusion. However with tensions over regulated prayer timings often leading to confrontation between members of both sects and local officials, in 1969 the Auqaf Department further separated the *waqf* properties of Bibi Pak Daman and gave up rights over the shrine's surrounding and attached lands. The *masjid* attached to the shrine, which had been recently renovated by devotees, was given up and the payment of salary to the Imam was passed on to local leaders.[380] This de-notification pointed at the government's initial reluctance to become too deeply involved in the daily religious functions at the shrine. Its initial focus at Bibi Pak Daman was similar to the stated goals at Sufi shrines across Pakistan – to regularize ritual administration, ensure that donations were funding shrine maintenance and not the network of caretakers and attendants that profit off the shrine, and creating a capable government bureaucracy.

Despite the Auqaf Department's desire to remain outside of explicitly religious disputes by returning the *masjid* to private ownership, just months later they were compelled to reassume "the administration, control, management, and maintenance of Masjid Hanfia" to restore order to a chaotic situation that had emerged from regulating and then de-regulating this space in such short order.[381] The existing staff – the *Imam*, or prayer leader, and the muezzin was again placed on the Auqaf payroll.[382] The

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[380] Memo from Assistant Manager for Waqf Properties, Sector V to Administrator Auqaf, Central Zone, Lahore. Memo No. AMLW-V-660/69. *[trans.]* Dec. 22, 1969. General Records of Darbar Hazrat Bibi Pak Daman.

[381] Order Notification from Raja Hamid Mukhtar, Chief Administrator of Auqaf, West Pakistan. *No.1(71)-Auqaf/63:* Amendment Schedule March 31, 1970. General Records of Darbar Hazrat Bibi Pak Daman, Lahore.

[382] Taking Over of Masjid. Memo No. AVZ-4(1)-104/SC/3641. April 4, 1970. General Records of Darbar Hazrat Bibi Pak Daman, Lahore; See also Memo No. 1(71) DWP-Auqaf/63 from Chief Administrator of Auqaf, Government of Punjab to Manager, Waqf Properties, Sector V with

consequence of this decision, however, was that for bureaucratic purposes, the *masjid* was designated in the same manner as the shrine – officially a Sunni religious site, albeit one where the rights of the minority communities could not be prejudiced.

This act marked the reengagement of the government in these divisive matters, but in a manner that would create a sectarian framework for regulating dispute. The brewing conflict remained at the forefront of Auqaf and Punjab Secretariat records. Close attention was paid to the activities of the devotees and detailed reports were exchanged over all matters as tensions at Ruqayyah's shrine began to escalate. In July 1970, an Auqaf official at Bibi Pak Daman alerted the central office of a crisis that was emerging at the shrine. For the previous two years, Sheikh Abdul Majid, a member of Bibi Pak Daman's Religious Purposes Committee, had been commissioning work and construction on the shrine from his own private finances.[383] The construction had been on the government's radar, but it had not been a matter that elicited enough reaction amongst devotees to interfere with. Once completed, however, the official noted with alarm, "Inside the dome, Sheikh Abdul Majid is having the names of the *Ayima Karam* (*Ahl al-Bayt*) inscribed in glass-etch work. On this issue, the *Ahl al-Sunnat* and their followers are raising objections that along with the names of *Ahl al-Bayt,* the names of the Prophet's Companions should be inscribed."[384]

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reference to Memo No. A.M.LHR-V/645/70, August 20, 1970. General Records of Darbar Hazrat Bibi Pak Daman, Lahore.

[383] This committee was compromised of influential community leaders, including members of the *mutawalli* families and *sajjada nashins*. The preeminence given to the Prophet's family versus the Prophet's companions (out of whom the first Caliphs emerged) is a point of ritual and doctrinal tensions between Sunni and Shi'as.

[384] Letter from Assistant Manager for Waqf Properties, Sector V to Chief Administrator Auqaf, Central Zone, Lahore. Memo No. AMLW-V-170, *[trans.]* July 1, 1970. General Records of Darbar Hazrat Bibi Pak Daman, Lahore.

This dispute was now firmly an Auqaf Department matter, both as a result of their position as the main form of authority onsite at Bibi Pak Daman and their appropriation of the *masjid* explicitly to mediate potential religious strife. The content of these inscriptions drew an immediate reaction from high-level Auqaf authorities. Officials discussed action that would neutralize the tension; because members of the shrine's official Religious Purpose Committee were involved, the government ultimately stepped in to act as an arbitrator. In reference to the above memo, the Chief Administrator, Auqaf ordered local officials "to take immediate measures to avoid the sectarian clash, by stopping the construction immediately. Further construction should not be started until a gentleman [sic] agreement is reached between the two parties."[385] This message was then passed on in a handwritten note to Sheikh Abdul Majid, requesting him to "stop further construction immediately to avoid sectarian clash at the shrine."[386] The context had been set. While previously these had been viewed as community disputes, they were now to be handled as sectarian conflict.

[385] Memo from Muhammad Hafizullah, Chief Administrator Auqaf, Central Zone, Lahore to Assistant Manager, Waqf Properties, Sector V, Lahore. Memo No. ACZ-4(1)-I03/RC/1720. July 4th, 1970. General Records of Darbar Hazrat Bibi Pak Daman, Lahore.
[386] Letter from Assistant Manager, Waqf Properties Sector V to Abdul Majid, Member RPC Hazrat Bibi Pak Damana, Lahore. July 11, 1970. General Records of Hazrat Bibi Pak Daman, Lahore.

(Figure 4.1: Inner grave coverings were also stitched with the *Ahl al-Bayt*)

In this particular instance, however, there were financial considerations at play alongside purely devotional concerns. Sheikh Abdul Majid had undertaken a much-needed renovation and aesthetic upgrade of the shrine, financed completely through private funds and donations. In response to the crackdown on his construction, he

claimed it was not intended as a religious or sectarian confrontation, but rather a tribute to the family of the women commemorated at the shrine. The government, too, was ever resistant to increasing their financial commitment to any one shrine, especially one as contentious as Bibi Pak Daman. As a result, they sought to mediate a solution that would not impede on the renovation entirely. The Chief Administrator of Auqaf sent new instructions to officials onsite, those who had had numerous dealings with the involved parties. He directed, "You were directed to stop the construction ~~personally~~ [sic] immediately …Now it is desired that you should try to settle the dispute between the two sects at your personal level, say by calling a meeting of the two sects and persuade them in a reasonable manner and tacts [sic].[387] In this instance, the Auqaf's financial interest clearly aligned with the Shi'a pilgrims and they claimed an inability to interfere with minority rights by preventing the renovation. But it had also moved a dispute amongst various local influences at the shrine into one that could only be viewed through the lens of sectarianism. Personal rivalries, business interests, and religious differences amongst pilgrims were subsumed into a pure Sunni-Shi'a dynamic. Following the government's lead, pilgrims and religious authorities too would engage within this framework.

In 1971, there was once again danger of "serious conflict" breaking out between Sunni and Shi'i devotees at the shrine.[388] The struggle began on July 27th, 1971, when a group of Sunni pilgrims commissioned the engraving of the four *Rāshidūn* caliphs on one of the internal structures in the shrine. The belief in the *Rāshidūn* is objectionable to Shi'as, who believe that the three earlier caliphs had usurped 'Ali's legitimate claim as

[387] Memo from Chief Administrator Auqaf, Central Zone, Lahore to Assistant Manager, Waqf Properties, Sector V, Lahore. Memo No. ACZ -4(1) – I03/RC/1788. July 23, 1970. General Records of Darbar Hazrat Bibi Pak Daman, Lahore.
[388] Shehzad, *Hazrat Bibi Pak Daman,* 16

Muhammad's successor. Inscribing their names on the shrine for one of 'Ali's daughters was seen as a deliberate provocation in this context. The conflict over ornamentation reveals how deeply aesthetics and devotion were linked at this site and the importance of the choice of textual references for devotees. As a result of the brewing conflict, on October 25th, 1971, the RPC and the Chief Administrator, Auqaf again called Shi'a and Sunni representatives together and discussed a compromise on the use of Bibi Pak Daman, to neutralize the warring division of space that had evolved. A joint ruling sought to pacify both parties. Men were barred from the inner sanctum of the shrine, a concession to Shi'a beliefs that respect for the piety and veiling of Ruqayyah and her family must continue even in their physical absence, as one of the most important tropes in Shi'a history is related to the forcible de-veiling of its women. This rule had been shared with the female attendants at the shrine in 1967; now, it was brought into these discussions as a part of a formalized and routinized religious conduct. Rather than a debate about men simply following proper traditions of *adab*, or respect, as it had been addressed previously, it became inserted into this sectarian framework.

To pacify Sunni devotees, it was decided that no *majālis* would be held inside the space of the shrine. This was interpreted as a significant blow to Shi'a organizations around Bibi Pak Daman, as *majālis* gatherings were a critical component of Muharram rituals and had historically been an important tool in reinterpreting the Karbala narrative based on political contexts. Most importantly, the *masjid* located inside Bibi Pak Daman – the one the government had so recently reacquired – would no longer issue the *azān,* or call to prayer, of either sect, so as to neutralize it. Thus, all people could pray inside, but it would no longer function as a mosque where devotees could congregate for collective

prayers.[389] This was a dramatic step – the Friday afternoon prayers were obligatory for Muslims to read in congregation. The mosque was seen as a living institution. Now this site would be emptied of doctrinal rituals and the blessings attached to praying together, deactivated from collective public use in order to avoid conflict.

That the government would take such an aggressive approach at Bibi Pak Daman is not surprising. In March 1971, the Awami League announced the declaration of independence of East Pakistan, beginning a nine month armed struggle against West Pakistan. All major elected leaders of the Awami League fled to India to set up a government in exile, with the full backing of the Indian government and armed forces. On December 16, 1971, East Pakistan was officially dissembled as a province of Pakistan and replaced by the new state of Bangladesh. The intense and pervasive sense of loss this event precipitated cannot be overstated. The impact of the war and the dismantling of Pakistan was "the most traumatic event in Pakistan's short life as an independent nation."[390] The material losses were tremendous – Pakistan lost over half its population, a significant portion of its territory, and its second most economically productive province. Politicians and the media reminded the population that the Hindus of India had never accepted the existence of Pakistan and remained ready to weaken it at any turn.[391] The new government of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, called to take over on December 20th, 1971, would play on the shame of the war. "Desperate men who were blinded by their lust for power and seemed to have been possessed by death had first destroyed and then

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[389] Shehzad, *Hazrat Bibi Pak Daman,* 17
[390] Hussain Haqqani, *Pakistan: Between Mosque and Military* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2005), 87.
[391] Abdul Majid, "India over-Reaching Itself," *The Pakistan Times*, June 3 1971; "White House Blames India for Conflict," *Dawn* newspaper, Dec. 13, 1971.

surrendered half the country to an aggressor. The other half was in imminent danger of destruction. The people of West Pakistan were lost and completely demoralized…An appalling defeat and disgrace had been inflicted on our unprepared people," Bhutto lamented in 1972.[392] More than the shame, however, was that the destruction of the territorial integrity of Pakistan dramatically undermined a central ideal of the Pakistan movement – that Islam was enough to create and hold the new nation-state together, even one with a discontiguous geographic reality.[393] The lesson was that political dissent and minority discontent could create a powerful platform to articulate grievances that could turn into the roots of dissolution. With trouble brewing in Baluchistan and the North West Frontier Province, any sectarian conflict had to be mitigated.

The struggle with East Pakistan provides an illuminating, albeit complicated, lens into the debates at Bibi Pak Daman. It is no surprise, then, that the government so swiftly acted to bring the parties together and neutralize the Sunni-Shi'a conflict at Bibi Pak Daman. Their perception of the threat of sectarian conflict undermining Islamic unity was real, and they acted to regulate behavior in a way they believed would temper these tensions. However, though officials agreed on the new terms, the prohibition on men entering the inner spaces shrine caused great unrest amongst the Sunni population, leading to a collective letter of protest to Governor of Punjab. On March 15th, 1972 a new notification was issued in response to these agitations. The new guidelines stated that there would be no limit on the recitation of the Qurān in the inner shrine by any pilgrim,

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[392] Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, Address as President of the National Assembly of Pakistan, April 14, 1972, Islamabad as quoted in *Pakistan Times,* April 15, 1972.
[393] For more on the challenges and the dissolution of East Pakistan see Glenn Stephenson, "Pakistan: Discontiguity and the Majority Problem," *Geographical Review,* Vol. 58, No. 2 (April 1968), 195-213; Elliot L. Tepper, "Pakistan and the Consequences of Bangladesh," *Pacific Affairs,* Vol. 45, No. 4 (Winter, 1972-1973), 573-581.

the names of the *Rāshidūn* were allowed to remain, and *majālis* would not to be allowed inside the inner courtyard of the shrine, "so that no person of one faith will commit an act that will wound the other side."[394] However, the notification reiterated that the shrine was acquired as a Sunni shrine and would continue as such, but the Sunni majority could not obstruct the Shi'a faithful from carrying out personal religious rituals.

This amended compromise revealed the uneasiness with attempts to categorize the shrine and the difficult balance the government sought to keep as a perceived neutral party. It is striking that both Sunnis and Shi'as appealed to officials to negotiate their spiritual and ritual differences and segment the physical interior of the shrine, illustrating the ways that devotees appropriated the government's takeover of the shrine as a new way for asserting their preferences, creating a new channel through which grievances could be aired. The state was now an active force on the ground at Bibi Pak Daman. The Auqaf Ordinances that federalized the shrine through the 1960s and '70s created a framework in which the use of space would be contested and divided, a development that affected the ways in which different communities related to Bibi Pak Daman.

The trust in government intervention, however, remained tenuous, as mistrust existed on all sides. For national purposes, the Auqaf Department had displayed an investment in affirming that the graves at Bibi Pak Daman belong to Bibi Ruqayyah and her companions, yet the majority of the members of the Religious Affairs Committee and the government authorities of the Auqaf Department were Sunnis. Once that became the lens through which these incidents were viewed, official interference, once tolerated and manipulated, was never greeted with total welcome. Indeed, the extent to which the

[394] Shehzad*, Hazrat Bibi Pak Daman,* 17.

government was able to exert control on day-to-day practice certainly varied. The distance between official judgments and daily ritual was illustrated on March 24th, 1972, when another petition from local Shi'a leaders, led by retired Lahore Court Judge Syed Jamil Hussein Rizvi, to the Chief Administrator of Auqaf led to an amendment permitting *majālis* to be held a few times a year in Bibi Pak Daman, with advance notice.[395] Despite the limited number of official gatherings allowed, however, Bibi Pak Daman remained a hub of activity throughout the year, with *majālis* held daily throughout the month of Muharram and on most important dates in the Shi'i calendar, making clear the distance between law and practices. Bibi Pak Daman provided a space in which these opposing frameworks were negotiated on the ground. Auqaf officials recognized the potential for conflict that free expression of rituals would ignite at a site such as Bibi Pak Daman. Their solution was to regulate and restrict activities so as to have minimum impact on the opposing sect. Rather than allow devotees to fill the space with meaning through narrative, prayer, and ritual, the government sought to empty the shrine of all contention.

Yet Bibi Pak Daman was not a settled site, and it continued to provide space for asserting identity. Maulvi Muhammad Bakhsh Shah Qureshi, the Shi'a representative on the Religious Affairs Committee, remained unsatisfied with the compromises on ceremonies at the shrine. He noted that the Chief Administrator of Auqaf, Punjab, had mandated a limit on Shi'a expressions of piety and that if any devotee "gets carried away by love and emotion and begins to recite a lamentation or weep, they are forcibly removed [from the site]." During *Chehlum* ceremonies in Lahore, commemorating forty days after the martyrdom of Husayn, a rider-less *Zuljanah* horse symbolizing Husayn's

[395] Shehzad*, Hazrat Bibi Pak Daman,* 17.

sacrifice had traditionally led a procession through the streets and ended at Bibi Pak Daman. Such evocative symbolism had now been prohibited by the compromises of the past months. For Qureshi, there was a disparity in regulation that had real implications on the lived experience of devotees. He charged unhappily,

> It was to my astonishment that I saw that in this holy and blessed shrine, when the Sunnis arranged the yearly *urs* under the auspices of the Auqaf within the boundaries of the shrine, not only did arrange a *milad* and *naat khani*, they organized a full musical evening with drums and chants. The *chadors* were spread by men on the holy grave….If a Shi'a devotee is moved by the presence of his Bibi and begins to cry or recite a lament, it is not permitted, but the Sunnis can play music and engage in revelry – why is there such a difference?[396]

Qureshi's anger at these Shi'a rituals being curtailed can be understood through Geertz's model of what ceremonies entail and why they matter. According to Geertz, ceremonies contain two distinct aspects – they provide a "model of" and a "model for" reality.[397] The *Zuljanah* horse was seen as a symbolic model of the reality of Husayn's rider-less horse returning to the camps to inform the women of the Imam's martyrdom. It was a way to access and invoke the emotional trauma of the moment in collective grief. Yet the imagery of Karbala also provided Shi'a Muslims an ideal paradigm for organizing the world, to make sense of their minority status and the injustices they associated with their history. Prohibiting the *Chehlum* procession from entering Bibi Pak Daman was a direct challenge to the reality of Shi'a experience and their attempts to impose meaning through ritual. For Qureshi, the latitude that was granted to Sunni visitors, whose *milad* was like a

[396] Maulavi Muhammad Bakhsh Shah Qureshi, *Al-Assad*, 26th July, 1972.
[397] Clifford Geertz, "Religion as a Cultural System," in Michael Banton (ed.), *Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion* (London: Routledge, 1966), 28.

"carnival" in which speakers were allowed to speak against Shi'as and their rituals, exacerbated the matter.

These attempts to neutralize the space were, of course, continuously negotiated, managed, and often disregarded by the different involved parties. They also existed within a national political context in which young Shi'a were galvanizing to assert collective action. In May 1972, the Imamia Students Organization was founded in Lahore, with the aim of advocating for Shi'a needs through religious and social outreach. Membership in the ISO would spread rapidly through much of Pakistan, and its students became increasingly vocal in the need for Shi'a voices to be heard in textbooks, public religious ritual, and Islamic charities. The ISO's emergence was a new voice in challenging the status quo and the state's attempts to quell religious and ethnic discontent. Those attempts continued at Bibi Pak Daman. A letter written in late 1973 from the Manager of Waqf Properties to the Head of Auqaf, Central Zone detailed multiple escalating events within the shrine that had challenged the neutrality of the site. He reiterated the Auqaf rules: "Other than fixed occasions of dates and hours, members of Shi'a and Sunni communities are not allowed to congregate for religious rituals." Pilgrims to the site regularly disregarded these schedules, conducting rituals and reciting prayers at all times of day. Yet in periods where tensions are heightened, as they were in the early 1970s, these rules become the default and Auqaf officials recommitted to a strict division of space. Any actions, even on the individual level, that challenged that order were seen as real threat. In this case, concerns were raised over a female devotee, Asma Kaneez, who had been chanting *nohas,* or poetic lamentations about Karbala. This was a danger, it was reported, because "while listening to her the Shi'a ladies begin *matam*

[beating of chests in lamentation], which is a violation of the restrictions and cause of tension. While watching the Shi'a ladies do *matam* inside the shrine makes the Sunni ladies angry, it can also lead them to retaliate as they have threatened. This matter can be prolonged and become a cause of conflict."[398]

Asma Kaneez protested that she was merely exercising her right to practice her faith at a public space, a ritual that was directly related to the story of Karbala. The official insisted, "If this is agreeable then the following notification should be publicly posted inside: 'Inside the shrine's inner grounds, after offering basic salutations and prayers, kindly restrict yourself to reciting the Qurān; other than that, *majlis, milād,* and *noha* can only be practiced in the allotted space and time.'"[399] Interestingly, the Auqaf manager does admit that these rituals were viewed as necessary religious expressions that "refresh" faith, yet when they carried such emotional resonance as to move listeners to collective action, they became a threat at a site like Bibi Pak Daman. The takeover of Bibi Pak Daman did not give the government legal license to dictate explicitly what religious expressions were practiced – a violation of constitutional rights – but they were able to enforce negotiated schedules under the threat of sectarian violence.

Bibi Pak Daman's Auqaf Manager goes on to relay another brewing conflict, one that again revolved around ornamentation: the inscription of a particular Qurānic verse that Shi'a Muslims believe refers to the Prophet's family. In Surah Al-Shūra, verse 23, Allah instructs Muhammad – "Say: no reward do I ask of you for this except the love of those near of kin." For Shi'as, this is a clear reference to 'Ali, Fatima, and their children,

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[398] Memo from Manager Waqf Properties, Central Zone, Lahore to Chief Administrator, Auqaf, Central Zone, Lahore. Memo No. AMLW-III-1933/73 [*trans*.]. Nov. 11, 1973. General Records of Darbar Hazrat Bibi Pak Daman, Lahore.
[399] *ibid,* Memo No. AMLW-III-1933/73 [*trans*.]. Nov. 11, 1973.

known as the *Ahl al-Bayt*, and a legitimization of the Shi'a line of succession; Sunnis contest this claim. At Bibi Pak Daman, this verse had a clear connotation, as Ruqayyah is the immediate link to the *Ahl al-Bayt*. The Manager of Waqf Properties related the following narrative about the conflict:

> Syed Ahmad Hussain Shah, a member of RPC [Religious Purpose Committee], has installed a black stone plaque inscribed with this ayat for which he received permission Oct. 25. Two other members [of RPC]…confirmed that no one had any objections to the installation of this stone. However, upon further inquiry, it was found that the installation was delayed for some time because the a*yāt* was engraved with the Urdu translation. Many Sunni devotees had objections to the translation. It was decided through negotiations that if this *ayāt* was installed without translation, there would be no objections. As a result, on this plaque, only the Qurānic *ayāt* is written, without any translation.[400]

The calculation made here is striking – there was no justifiable reason to remove a verse of the Qurān from a sacred site, even one as polarizing as Bibi Pak Daman. In this case, negotiations between Sunni and Shi'a members of the RPC had reached a settlement, yet it was outcry from pilgrims that prompted a change in the agreement. A translation into the vernacular would allow pilgrims to understand the meaning of the verse. For a site like Bibi Pak Daman, translations, narratives, and understanding threatened the balance of what could be allowed and managed. Only Arabic – that few could understand – would be permitted.

For multiple reasons, the Auqaf Department had displayed an investment in affirming that the graves at Bibi Pak Daman belong to Ruqayyah and her companions, supporting hagiographies and accounts that verified the authenticity of the graves. Nevertheless, because of the years of encroachment in a Sunni-populated area, the

[400] *ibid,* Memo No. AMLW-III-1933/73 [*trans*.], Nov. 11, 1973.

network of *sajjada nashins* that claimed authority over the shrine, and the identification of the majority of devotees, the government acquired the site as a Sunni religious site. Auqaf officials and the government managed this duality by understanding and ordering behavior in a sectarian context. Pilgrims, religious leaders, and local residents internalized these constructs. The bureaucratization of religious representation and the segmentation of rules and rituals constructed a formal sectarianism at the shrine, one perpetuated by government attempts to neutralize the space from conflict. The Auqaf takeover in the 1960s was not without opposition, nor did these ordinances create uniform standards. Indeed, as seen in these instances, those rules continued to be negotiated, as devotees repeatedly appealed against and to the government in their attempts to assert autonomy over their religious practice. In these instances, devotees displayed a remarkable degree of sophistication, playing various branches of the government against each other to receive the desired ruling and utilizing the language of constitutional rights to continue their devotional routines. Yet these contestations over space, finance, and ritual also created a new way of 'being Shi'a' at the Bibi Pak Daman shrine. Being Shi'a meant an explicit acceptance of the narrative of Ruqayyah bint 'Ali and the practices that corresponded to those beliefs; it was now equally defined by the government as a structure of behavior to be regulated, in opposition to Sunni attempts to control space.

The emergence of sectarianism at the shrine also existed within a rapidly changing national framework. The loss of East Pakistan and the rise of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in 1971 marked a new frame of reference for Shi'a Muslims. Bhutto was not an outwardly religious man, though he drew much support from Pakistan's Shi'a multitudes,

around a fifth of the population. His years in office represented an era of Shi'a prominence in public life, challenged by rising rightwing and Sunni Islamic opposition. In 1973, Bhutto acquiesced to religious pressure and ratified a constitution that officially declared the minority Ahmadi community as non-Muslims. It was viewed in part as a Machiavellian move, deflecting attention from the Shi'a community and saving certain policy agendas by allowing the othering of the Ahmadiyya in its stead.[401] While Bhutto sought to portray himself as a secular politician, his actions would keep Pakistan firmly on a sectarian footing. It would only be exacerbated by Zia ul-Haq's coup in 1977 and the aggressive Islamization policies of his regime. Yet while the rise of Zia is frequently identified as a flashpoint for the creation of sectarian divides in Pakistan, the interactions at Bibi Pak Daman in the decade preceding reveal how 'being Shi'a' and acting sectarian began to take shape and what particular histories were appealed to.

Old Authority Meets the New State

Despite the Auqaf Department's presence at Bibi Pak Daman and its prominent role as arbitrator between Sunnis and Shi'as through the 1970s, there remained other influential presences at the site that endured, as the shrine was an internal frontier where rival ideologies and claims were mapped at a particularly fluid period of change in Pakistan. The dynamic between the *mutawallis* and the government in matters of religious conflict illustrate the other continuing tension that played out at Bibi Pak Daman – the older forms of familial authority and inheritance that had laid claim to the

[401] See Stanley Wolpert, *Zulfi Bhutto of Pakistan: His Life and Times* (London: Oxford University Press, 1993) and Herbert Feldman, "Pakistan in 1974," *Asian Survey,* Vol. 15, No. 2 (Feb. 1975), 110-116.

lands around Bibi Pak Daman against the 'new' order of government bureaucracy established after Pakistan's independence. According to most estimates, after the nationalization of *waqf* properties, the Auqaf Department had received most of its income from cash-box income in the Lahore region, and a large portion of those funds had been collected at Bibi Pak Daman.[402] The question of who received this income was particularly fraught at Bibi Pak Daman, since the caretakers were not direct descendants of the saint buried at the shrine – as at most other shrines around Pakistan under the Auqaf Department's control – and claims of authentication and ancestry were difficult to legitimate. Nevertheless, the struggle for control and mistrust of financial dealings pervaded the interactions between caretakers and government officers. The three locks that guard the donation boxes were opened simultaneously on Fridays in the presence of representatives from all groups - neither the Auqaf officials or the *mujawwars* (another local term for *mutawalli*) could complete the ritual without the presence of the other, nor did they trust other representatives with the proceeds. The tenuous nature of the alliance between older and newer forms of authority at Bibi Pak Daman was a microcosm of the similar interplay that existed across Pakistan since the Auqaf Ordinances were first issued, but it took on an added dimension at Bibi Pak Daman, where the government alternated between the objective broker in sectarian debates and the political force undermining traditional rituals and relationships with their new bureaucracy. Bibi Pak Daman was a critical space, both in religious imaginings and charitable donations, and the stakes were extremely high.

[402] Malik, 94; Interview with Mian Muhammad Syed, January 3rd, 2011.

The *sajjada nashins* at Bibi Pak Daman occupied a fluid middle ground, negotiating with the government to maintain some of their influence and mounting legal challenges when they felt their hereditary rights were being impeded. These *sajjada nashins* were previously the sole beneficiaries of donations and funding to the shrine, free to spend at their discretion. Many had some of their own personal lands taken into government possession in 1967, and it is over those lands that the legal challenges emerged in the subsequent decades. In these situations, however, the Auqaf Department painted themselves as protectors of the pilgrims and their interests. In a discussion with a legal advisor to the department, the Auqaf Manager at Bibi Pak Daman relates an ongoing conflict with Abdul Karim, one of the *gaddi nashins* present at the handover of the shrine in 1967. A judge in Lahore's High Court had inquired why Auqaf officials had begun construction on land that was still under dispute between present and past *gaddi nashins* and the Auqaf department. The *gaddi nashins* had filed an injunction to halt all further development without their consent, but Auqaf officials had ignored it: "There are large numbers of pilgrims and devotees visiting the shrine who desire to stay overnight but at present there are only 2 rooms available for guests that are totally insufficient. The guests are extremely inconvenienced and have no shelter from heat or rain." The constraint had become so serious that the local Auqaf offices "requested Punjab Governor Lieutenant Ghulam Jilani to request permission to build. Thereafter Chief Administrator Auqaf, Punjab, on great public demand and pressure, gave permission for construction…for convenience of devotees and pilgrims visiting the shrine and has no connection with the past *mutawalli* or matters concerning them.[403] This letter was also

[403] Memo from Manager Auqaf, Sector V (Bibi Pak Daman) to Legal Advisor, Office of Chief

published as a circular at the shrine, as part of the Auqaf's strategy to position this land as a public good, appeal to the pilgrims at the shrine, and circumvent both the local influence of the *gaddi nashins* and the legal processes carried out by other branches of government. Their actions, of course, were not selfless: the funds to be earned by expanding rental properties onsite would add significantly to the shrine's revenues, income that would be completely inaccessible to Abdul Karim.

Yet Auqaf officials were not always able to present themselves in an altruistic fashion in disputes with the *gaddi nashins*. These families had long been influential residents in the Bibi Pak Daman area, developing ties that existed even before the creation of the new Pakistani state and its apparatus. Over the decades, they expanded their support through marriage and kinship ties, by awarding patronage and access at the shrine, and forging alliances with merchants and bazaar shopkeepers. These older networks of authority commonly emerged in shrine regions, and Bibi Pak Daman was no exception. By virtue of their standing in their community or the individual acts of patronage they awarded, they were often able to gain backing from residents and pilgrims against government intervention. In 1985, Muhammad Abdul Jaleel, son of Nizam ul-Din Sabiq, *gaddi nashin*, entered into a series of disputes with local police and Auqaf officials over a graveyard he claimed was private property. He had been burying members of his family in this particular graveyard since 1972 and claimed he had written documents from the Chief Administrator Auqaf de-notifying that piece of land. Muhammad Abdul Jaleel also cited a circular dated August 26th, 1960 that proved the Department of Auqaf

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Administrator, Auqaf, Lahore. Memo No. MLW81-3-Auqaf/444 [*trans*.] Sept. 17, 1981. General Records of Darbar Hazrat Bibi Pak Daman, Lahore.

had no control over private graveyards in the area.[404] Because of the increase in pilgrims to the shrine and rapid encroachment, this *gaddi nashin* sought to build a fence around this plot of land to protect his family's graves. The government resisted, claiming that the *sajjada nashins* at Bibi Pak Daman had simply usurped the land and claimed it as their own. Living on or using land did not invalidate the initial *waqf* arrangement for Bibi Pak Daman, nor did it invalidate the legal right the Auqaf Department now had to those lands.

Abdul Jaleel took another tactic, drawing on his history at the shrine. He emphasized his importance in the community, arguing that through the recent troubles at Bibi Pak Daman, he had been "daily settling fights and argument between Shi'a and Sunni ladies. To protect petitioner's own legal rights as well as prevent Sunni-Shi'a conflict, I have locked the graves around Mai Tanveeri and…put a notice that entry cannot be gained without permission. Petitioner thinks all disputes should be settled with respect."[405] His purported role in mediating the growing sectarian conflicts emerging at the shrine was of particular import, at a time when "Islamization" policies were increasingly focused on a rigid adoption of conservative principles, many of which alienated minorities such as the Shi'a. Abdul Jaleel expressed his sadness that "despite my loyalty to you they have not reached an agreement, nor has petitioner been contracted by a senior official from Auqaf. If the Auqaf department can prove [my] claims to be false, [I] would forgo them…Does the Auqaf Department deny me the religious right to

[404] Memo from Chief Administrator Auqaf, Lahore to All Deputy Commissioners in West Pakistan. Wide Circular Letter, No. 1-(14) Aukaf 60.D. Aug. 26, 1960. Circulars Office, Records, Punjab Secretariat.
[405] Letter from Muhammad Abdul Jaleel, Gaddi Nashin, Darbar Bibi Pak Daman to Manager Waqf Properties, Central Zone, Lahore. Record No. 1 (M.A.J)(P.G.Y) [*trans*.]. March 25, 1985. General Records of Darbar Hazrat Bibi Pak Daman, Lahore.

my family's graves?"[406] The language of religious rights was a powerful one, especially at a time that the state faced growing challenges framed in religious discourse.

This dispute continued for a period of years, becoming increasingly strident, but the lack of a respect for the social standing of a *gaddi nashin* continued to be one of the main points of contention. In a letter to the local police station to file complaint about trespassing on 'his' land, Abdul Jaleel challenged the Auqaf Department's claims to the land at Bibi Pak Daman,

> The petitioner is a *gaddi nashin* from Bibi Pak Daman, Chairman of the Shi'a Sunni Peace Committee and every year has received recognition for Shi'a Sunni unity efforts, which judiciary and administration is witness to…The dargah of Bibi Pak Daman is in control of Department of Auqaf, even though it is not a waqf property. Petitioner had three private graveyards, to which the Auqaf Department has no connections or rights to…where many of his ancestors and close relatives are buried.[407]

He continued on to point out that he was a vital member of the shrine community, opening a small private canteen near his property for pilgrims and providing negotiating services at the shrine to mediate sectarian disputes.

Despite their influence in the community, however, there remained great public mistrust of the self-serving interests of the *sajjada nashins*. Devotees of Bibi Ruqayyah, both Sunni and Shi'a, believed that for decades these men simultaneously supported the alternate view that the shrines hold the graves of the daughters of Syed Ahmad Tokhta; as *sajjada nashins* to this Sufi *pīr*, it would be their right to be involved in shrine affairs. In a book endorsed by the Auqaf Department as the preeminent hagiography and history of the shrine, this rival story is rejected as phony scheme: "All these lies were written to

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[406] *ibid,* Record No. 1 (M.A.J)(P.G.Y) [*trans*.], March 25, 1985.
[407] Petition from Muhammad Abdul Jaleel, *Gaddi Nashin*, Darbar Bibi Pak Daman to Deputy Superintendent Police, Area Qila Gujjar Singh. Sections 452/506 [*trans*.] Nov. 11, 1988. Punjab Secretariat, Lahore.

support Sunni sectarian views and *mujawwar* claims, so that if the Auqaf Department ever releases the shrine, their descendants will get a share."[408]

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The process of imagining, activating, and contesting Bibi Pak Daman brought to the forefront larger questions about the role of the state, gender, and religious practice in the years following Pakistan's independence. The shrine was a space in which Shi'a Muslims could articulate an identity that placed them in the center of Pakistan's creation myths. The importance of the shrine and its implications remained at the center of these debates – indeed, it was the particular nuances of Bibi Pak Daman and Ruqayyah's life that transformed the shrine into an internal frontier of contestation. "For us, the people of Pakistan, what a fortunate blessing that for our spiritual guidance, one the children of 'Ali came as a guest to our land," the Auqaf Department recognized, "but in our petty quarrels we have not recognized her as she deserved."[409] Yet it was in these quarrels that a picture of the intimate challenges of the nation-building project emerged.

On July 5th, 1977, General Zia ul-Haq ascended to power in a military coup, arresting Bhutto and members of his cabinet. Almost immediately, Zia ul-Haq would institute his new *Nizam-e-Mustafa*. The contours of state and the nature of religion in public life and private ritual changed dramatically. "The basis of Pakistan was Islam," Zia declared. But what Islam – and who could practice it – would ignite tensions on the ground at Bibi Pak Daman, in the shrine and its bazaar.

[408] Hashmi, *Makhdooma Bibi Ruqayyah,* 10.
[409] Hashmi, *Makhdooma Bibi Ruqayyah*, 159.

Chapter Five
Transactional Spaces: Bibi Pak Daman, Sayyeda Zaynab, and a New Shi'a Transnationalism

Three times a week, Zehra Niaz arrives at the shrine of Bibi Pak Daman early in the morning in her most simple cotton *shalwar kameez*. Broom in hand, Zehra sets to work rinsing, sweeping, and ordering the inner mausoleum and courtyard, preparing Ruqayyah's shrine for the day's onslaught of visitors. With her is a small group of ladies who frequent the shrine on as many mornings as they can, gathering to perform this humble service in the hopes that Ruqayyah would intercede for their prayers. Yet while these women arrive in modest clothing to administer to the shrine, those who are granted the privilege to clean after the pilgrims and dust Ruqayyah's mausoleum are from the most influential families in Lahore. Zehra Niaz herself belongs to prominent Shi'a political clan – her uncle had been a Senator from Punjab province, the family owned vast tracts of rural agricultural land, and her husband was a current Member of Parliament. Like many other women who grew up in Lahore, Zehra had witnessed her mother and female relatives frequent Bibi Pak Daman in times of need or distress, finding comfort in *ziyārat* to Ruqayyah's shrine. Yet her status and political access allowed her a window into the "bureaucracy and corruption of Auqaf officials," she lamented, and she had vowed to use her influence to expand and develop the shrine into a modern sacred space, a structure fitting for a revered figure of Ruqayyah's status. She began working with the Bibi Pak Daman Trust, an extension of the Religious Affairs Committee established by Asma Mamdot, a Member of Parliament and ardent devotee of Ruqayyah bint 'Ali. The members of the Bibi Pak Daman Trust were a mix of Shi'a and Sunni, all

from the wealthy landed political classes of the Punjab, all united in their suspicion of the male Auqaf officials and *sajjada nashins* onsite who handled the donations from pilgrims. "The money that flows through this shrine should be enough to make this the most beautiful shrine in our nation," Zehra stated in English, "but where has that money all gone?"[410]

As she stooped to collect the remnant flower petals that dropped off ornate garlands deposited by pilgrims – "I keep these at home where I read Qurān," she explained – Zehra recalled travelling to the Sayyeda Zaynab shrine in 1985 with her father, aunt, and sister. Her father had a manufacturing contract with business contacts in Damascus, and her family had the wealth to manage to the trip in relative comfort. Despite maintaining that part of her devotion to Ruqayyah bint 'Ali stemmed from her love of Zaynab, Husayn, and the Prophet's family, the memories and intricate details of her short *ziyārat* now eluded Zehra. Instead, what stayed with her was the feeling of being distinctly Shi'a, in a period when heightened sectarian divides and political tensions meant that Shi'as were actively asserting their identity across transnational space. She had grown up amongst an older generation that downplayed sectarian identity

[410] Field notes, interview with Zehra Niaz, July 10, 2012, Lahore. Zehra responded to all questions posed in Urdu in flawless English, as upper class Pakistanis educated in English medium schools frequently did. Zehra's name has been altered here, as she was worried about the implications for the Bibi Pak Daman Trust in speaking too critically to an outsider, as they still relied to some extent on access provided by Auqaf officials. In a letter addressed to the Manager of Auqaf at Bibi Pak Daman and the Secretary of Auqaf for the Government of Punjab, the Bibi Pak Daman Trust lamented, "In our previous meeting we were assured that all administrative matters shall be taken care of and all the missing facilities shall be provided but…until today nothing has been done so far…It is sad to note that the income earned on daily basis from this holy shrine is enough to improve the dilapidated condition but we fail to understand why the shrine of the daughter of Hazrat Ali (AS) is not given its due importance and is in a total state of neglect?" Letter from Managing Committee to Gondol Saheb, Oct. 25, 2008. Records of Bibi Pak Daman Trust via Asma Mamdot, Chairman, MPA National Assembly.

in public life, as for decades Shi'a political leaders had followed the example of Muhammad Ali Jinnah and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and remained loyal to secular or regional parties. Yet when she traveled to the Sayyeda Zaynab shrine "it was like the Shi'as were everywhere in the world," she recalled. "Around the shrine next to pictures of 'Ali and Husayn there were pictures of [Ayatollah] Khomeini, but those same pictures we saw in Pakistan everywhere. He was the hero for the students, for Shi'as. All the *bazaar-walas* sold his posters." For Zehra's family the visibility and awareness of being Shi'a was enhanced by living through Zia ul-Haq's Islamization programs, which attempted to create a normative state Islam that homogenized public religiosity.[411] Yet from Damascus to Lahore, the pictures of Khomeini had spread, and the implications of Shi'ism and the visitation to shrines had changed.

By 1979, seismic shifts were occurring in the geopolitical landscape, creating new realities on the ground at the Sayyeda Zaynab and Bibi Pak Daman shrines. For much of the early and mid-20th century, evolving narratives, entrenched interests, and new regimes coalesced to turn the shrines into established sites of meaning and contestation. Through the tumultuous 1970s, these sites had maintained a balance between national appeals and sectarian claims, caught in competing discourses of authenticity and new authority. With the changing demographics and international contexts of the 1980s, however, the shrines became more decidedly sectarian spaces. Despite continued attempts by states to universalize – or even neutralize – their meaning, *ziyārat* to the Sayyeda Zaynab and Bibi

[411] In addition to presidential Ordinances, Zia ul-Haq changed the legal and constitutional framework of the state to reflect his Islamization programs. In 1978 he introduced Shari'at courts to determine whether existing laws confirmed with the Qurān and *Sunnah*, on which sat groups of *ulama* who did not need to be legally qualified. In 1986, the Ninth Amendment provided constitutional grounding to empower the President and the nation's Shar'iat Court to be the highest law making authorities in Pakistan.

Pak Daman shrines increasingly became a critical way to express being Shi'a. Who was visiting these shrines, the languages in which they operated, and the aesthetics of the sites were transformed by merchants, pilgrims, and authorities alike at the Sayyeda Zaynab and Bibi Pak Daman. New images and a flourishing transnational Shi'a material culture shaped these sites into multifaceted visual spectacles, with bazaars that projected transnationally and shaped identity through consumption.

The two sites became further linked through bazaar and gender dynamics, especially as the concepts of *barakat* (blessings) or *karamāt* (miracles) were conceived and used.[412] Shi'a commemoration and mourning rituals were a means through which bonds between believers and saints were cemented, creating communal ties of remembered suffering through Ruqayyah and Zaynab and the scenes they witnessed at Karbala. Yet the shrines also allowed devotees to individualize their relationship to the saint, through their requests for *barakat*, the purchase of souvenirs and gifts in the bazaar, and their interaction with the space of the shrine. Pilgrims constructed interpretations for their behavior, as the Sayyeda Zaynab and Bibi Pak Daman were lived, layered sacred spaces. With shrine officials and religious authorities promoting bazaars and appropriate uses of the shrine spaces, the divide over 'folk/popular' versus 'orthodox/*ulama* was blurred. While hagiographies and narratives were often produced and consumed by a self-selecting audience, at the shrine they could be shaped and contested, especially in states where Shi'as constituted a minority. Indeed, it was at these shrines that the fluidity

[412] Anne Betteridge has categorized two kinds of miracles in contemporary Shi'a understandings: *mu'jizāt*, which are "rare and earthshaking" and *karamāt*, which are "more modest miracles." This chapter will focus primarily on *karamāt,* the kind of every day interventions that devotees ask of their saints. See Anne Betteridge, "Specialists in Miraculous Action: Some Shrines in Shiraz," in Alan Morinis, ed., *Sacred Journeys: The Anthropology of Pilgrimage* (Westport, Greenwood Press, 1992).

between textual representations and practiced spirituality emerged – both informed the other, and neither can be looked as the whole embodiments of religious experience. The Imams had prescribed Ziyārat, but how it was undertaken changed. Through increases in pilgrimage and visual culture, the growth of ritual and the bazaar, and the use of space, the Sayyeda Zaynab and Bibi Pak Daman became transnational Shi'a sites, reflective of the complex attitudes of what 'being Shi'a' now meant.

The Sayyeda Zaynab and Bibi Pak Daman in a New World Order

The ramifications of the political upheavals that played out across borders at the turn of the decade would have a direct impact on life at the Sayyeda Zaynab at Bibi Pak Daman shrines. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and Hafez al-Assad were largely secular politicians with ties to a religious minority, and both drew legitimacy in part by emphasizing the marginalization of their particular ethnic groups. International events and domestic upheaval, however, compelled them to validate their leadership through Islamic appeals.[413] The Iranian Revolution in 1979, ongoing turmoil in Iraq, and new dynamics of Shi'a mobilization and public religiosity changed the space of and around the Sayyeda Zaynab shrine, creating a transnational milieu enhanced by a growth in pilgrimage. Yet the regime of Hafez al-Assad sought to maintain a delicate balance, capitalizing on the benefits of the shrine and the explosion of sentiment around Zaynab, while maintaining some 'official' distance from sectarian affiliation. In Pakistan, Zia ul-Haq's 1977 coup

[413] Bhutto organized the Lahore Summit in 1974 for the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, part of his foreign policy shift to engage more actively with the Islamic countries of the Middle East. Newly declared by Musa al-Sadr as part of the mainstream of Muslims sects, al-Assad's attendance gave him visual grounding amongst the political leaders of the Muslim world in a period of increasing tensions with the Muslim Brotherhood.

accelerated the emphasis on Islam as a guiding policy principle, an impulse that had been growing through the 1970s with Bhutto's focus on alliances with the Gulf and the Middle East. Yet it was the dual impact of the Iranian Revolution and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1980 that led to increased pressure and calls for Islam to play a significant part of public life in Pakistan – but the question of which interpretation of Islam would be played out at Bibi Pak Daman.

The concept of abrupt change certainly does not capture the complex and evolving nature of geopolitical alliances, and the Iranian Revolution alone did not completely transform the realities of the Sayyeda Zaynab overnight. Indeed, though sectarian ties were crystalizing and devotees had begun to embrace new understandings of "being Shi'a" throughout the 1970s, the Syrian involvement in the Lebanese Civil War also illustrated the complexity of understanding behavior purely through a sectarian lens.[414] The sources of discontent in Iran, too, stemmed from a myriad of socioeconomic, political, and religious factors. Yet the dramatic overthrow of the Shah, the rise of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini and his *Velayat-e-Faqih* (or Governance of the Islamic Jurist), and the transformation of the Iranian state in short order into one based on a revolutionary Shi'a ideology undoubtedly created a new framework for understanding religion in public life. Much scholarship has been done on the new narratives that emerged out of the Iranian Revolution, the way religion was adopted as a language of protest, and public ritual mourning became a galvanizing force for action.[415] In practice,

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[414] In 1976, Musa al-Sadr intervened to prevent a break between the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Syrian regime. See Henry Tanner, "P.L.O Urges Syria to Quit Lebanon," *The New York Times,* May 15, 1976.

[415] Part One of this dissertation lays out the evolution of narratives and changes after the Iranian Revolution and cites additional sources. For further work on the subject, see Peter Chelkowski,

this new reality did have some immediate impact. In 1980 Nabih Berri, the new leader of Amal, clarified, "We have learned many lessons from the Iranian revolution, among them that reason is stronger than arms, and the word is stronger than the bomb, and religion has its own revolutionary impact…The Iranian revolution has helped us a great deal in that it has shown us that the weak and the deprived can fight and do have strength if they are united."[416] Ali Shari'ati's new discourse on Shi'ism and the depiction of Zaynab as a defiant figure had linked her shrine to a new range of meanings in the build up to the Revolution. While pilgrims in various times had always individually interpreted *ziyārat*, the Sayyeda Zaynab was now charged with a new political and spiritual significance, an assertively Shi'a sacred space that was the subject of intensifying pressures.

This was a new paradigm for the shrine. From Muhsin al-Amīn to Mahdi Murtadha and beyond, the authorities that promoted the shrine understood the value of engaging in the resonant discourses of their time – nationalism, pan-Arabism, pan-Islamism – and increasingly Shi'a rhetoric was gaining popularity. Yet it was not just in narrative framing that the shrine evolved. Political contexts beyond the Iranian Revolution made Syria and the Sayyeda Zaynab a transnational focal point and changed the demographics of the shrine. In 1979, demonstrations swept Iraq in support of Ayatollah Khomeini and Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr, the ideological founder of the al-Da'wa party. In response, the Iraqi Ba'athist state cracked down on Shi'a political activity. Hafez al-Assad was forced to assure Saddam Hussein that Syria had not

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"The Art of Revolution and War: The Role of Graphic Arts in Iran," in *Picturing Iran: Art, Society, and Revolution*, eds. Shiva Balaghi and Lynn Gumpert (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 103-125; Michael Fischer and Mehdi Abedi, "Revolutionary Posters and Cultural Signs," in *Middle East Report* 159 (July – August 1989), 29-32; Martin Kramer, *Shi'ism, Resistance, and Revolution*, ed. Martin Kramer (Boulder: Mansell, 1987).

[416] Loren Jenkins, "Lebanon's Shiites: A Major New Force," *The Washington Post,* Aug. 5, 1980.

participated in attempts to overthrow his government, with the tension between the two Ba'athist regimes, Syria's growing alliance with Iran, and suspicion of Shi'a ties souring relations between the two countries.[417] Baqir al-Sadr was detained and transported to Baghdad, "his representatives and hundreds of Da'wa members were rounded up and imprisoned or executed…His sister, Amina al-Sadr, known as Bint al-Huda, went to the holy shrine of Imam 'Ali and gave a fiery speech urging people to demonstrate against the government and to protect their leader."[418] Bint al-Huda was her brother's staunchest companion, a vocal supporter of Shi'a advancement in Iraq, and an advocate for women's issues. A prolific writer, Bint al-Huda was a well-known figure, had published fictional novels, wrote advice columns in Shi'a newsletters, and had established women's schools in Najaf endorsed by the grand *marja'* Muhsin al-Hakim. On April 5th, 1980, she was arrested with Ayatollah al-Sadr and executed without trial on April 8th; their bodies were never recovered. On learning of their deaths, Ayatollah Khomeini stated it was "with utmost grief I have come to know that the martyr Ayatollah Sayyid Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr, and his illustrious, noble sister, who held a high station among the scholars and possessed a radiant position in the literary field, have attained martyrdom."[419]

The symbolism of a Shi'a woman from a respected family publically rallying supporters in favor of her mistreated brother was not lost in that charged atmosphere. In death, Bint al-Huda had been proclaimed an illustrious martyr, an attribute rarely invoked for women, and at the Sayyeda Zaynab the comparison was deliberately invoked. Her

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[417] Marvine Howe, "Assad Reassures Iraqis that Syria had no hand in attempted coup," *The New York Times, Aug. 7, 1979.*
[418] T.M. Aziz, "The Role of Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr in Shi'i Political Activism in Iraq from 1958-1980," in *International Journal of Middle East Studies,* Vol. 25, No. 2 (May, 1993), 216.
[419] Quoted in Chibli Mallat, *The Renewal of Islamic Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 52.

writings were present in every bookstall, a newly paved side street was named in her honor in 1981, and in 1983 Iraqi properties fleeing from Saddam Hussein's crackdown opened al-Aminah, a new women's accommodation to house female pilgrims.[420] Indeed, exiles from Iraq had already made a growing impact on the infrastructure of the Sayyeda Zaynab in the 1970s; the Shirazi brothers and the establishment of the *hawza* Zaynabiyya began a period of rapid growth and interest in the shrine as an alternate Shi'a learning center. The region around the Sayyeda Zaynab, known as Sitt Zaynab, became a haven for refugees from a range of conflicts, from the expanding Lebanese Civil War to the crackdowns in Iraq. The demographics became more international, with the Syrian government providing basic services for the new influx, but the area around the shrine also became more distinctly Shi'a as refugees, students, and *ulama* arrived in greater quantity. The number of Twelver Shi'as living in Syria as whole rose significantly after 1980 with the arrival of forty thousand Iraqi Shi'as suspected of having Iranian affiliations and purged by Saddam Hussein.[421] These Iraqis and many Lebanese Shi'as settled around the Sayyeda Zaynab, along with students arriving from Pakistan, India, and the Gulf states who were drawn to the Sayyeda Zaynab by the new possibilities it offered.[422] For many of these new residents and visitors, it was a new accommodating space for establishing a communal and public Shi'a identity. The transnational appeals

[420] Field notes, interview with Qasim Husayn Abdel-Hakim, March 13, 2012, Damascus.
[421] Marion Farouk-Sluglett and Peter Sluglett, *Iraq Since 1958* (London: I.B. Tauris, [1987] 2001), 258.
[422] Edith Szanto's fieldwork on the Sayyeda Zaynab explores in more detail the layout and current demographics of the shrine. She notes that the Shari'a al-'Iraqiyīn and its sidestreets generally catered to an elevated higher socio-economic status, and wealthy students and pilgrims from the Gulf occupied the eastern side of the shrine. For more see Edith Szanto, "Following Sayyeda Zaynab: Twelver Shi'ism in Contemporary Syria" (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 2012).

that began with the rhetorical reimagining of Zaynab by Ali Shari'ati and Musa al-Sadr were actualized on the ground.

While the fallout of geopolitical realities changed the appeal of the shrine, the new Iranian regime also became actively engaged at the Sayyeda Zaynab. Individuals and the Shah's personal office had made donations for the upkeep of the site, but for the new Iranian regime the expansion of the Sayyeda Zaynab had consequences beyond a cultural or religious agenda. Funding the Sayyeda Zaynab certainly affirmed the Iranian state's devoutly Shi'a credentials, but the alliance with Syria also gave it a credible Arab ally in the brewing showdown with Iraq. Indeed, the ratcheting up of tensions between Iran and Iraq would erupt into outright conflict in September 1980 and last a costly eight years, the longest war of the 20th century and the most destructive military conflict since World War II.[423] Both Iran and Iraq engaged in full-scale rhetorical and propaganda wars through print and airwaves, with Iran careful to portray its revolutionary mission as a pan-Islamic, not Shi'a, cause. In turn, Saddam Hussein, a rival to Syria's Ba'athist party, wrapped himself in evocative historical and cultural tropes that appealed to older strains of pan-Arabism. In broadcasts he referred to himself as "the leader of their Arab nation, the knight of the Arabs, the conqueror of the racist Persians."[424] The Sayyeda Zaynab became a new territory onto which these disputes were mapped. Saddam Hussein versus

[423] See Farhang Rajaee, *The Iran-Iraq War: The Politics of Aggression* (Gainseville: University of Florida Press, 1993); Efraim Karsh, "Geopolitical Determinism: The Origins of the Iran-Iraq War," in *Middle East Journal,* Vol. 44, No. 2 (Spring , 1990), 256-268; Jasim M. Abdulghani, *Iraq and Iran: The Years of Crisis* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984).
[424] Youssef M. Ibrahim, "Iran and Iraq Fill the Airwaves with Angry Rhetoric," *The New York Times,* Oct. 7, 1980. Saddam Hussein routinely called on the Battle of Qadisiyyah to frame the conflict and de-legitimize Iran's Muslim credentials, invoking a battle fought in 636AD between the Arab Muslims and the Sassanid Persian army during the early years of Islamic expansion. See Kanan Makiya, *The Monument: Art, Vulgarity, and Modern Middle Eastern Discourse* (London, IB Taurus 2004).

Ayatollah Khomeini, Iraqi refugees fleeing persecution, Iranian pilgrims and revolutionary leaders asserting their religious ideology, Shi'a students and *ulama* drawn to new *hawzas*, and Syrian Twelver shrine authorities and Alawi state officials were brought together around the shrine in the early 1980s, marking it as a space on which the battle for identities and allegiances could play out.

If the Iranian Revolution gave Syria a new ally in the changing geopolitical landscape, its repercussions were similarly deeply felt in Pakistan. With a long shared border and a significant Shi'a population, Pakistanis watched the unfolding events in Iran with a mix of admiration and apprehension. Bhutto had enjoyed good relations with the Shah of Iran, and the presence of a stable and friendly state on one border had provided Pakistan stability in its constant tensions with India. In the context of the growing popularity of Islamic parties at home, however, the sight of the mass protests sweeping Iran and invoking a revolutionary Shi'a ideology presented an uneasy reality for many in Pakistan. In August, 1978, an editorial in Dawn newspaper warned, "It is for the forces in opposition to recognize that their failure to settle their differences with the government with a compromise would destabilize the country further, and this can have serious implications for the security and stability of not only Iran, but the region as a whole."[425] As the revolutionary forces picked up steam and the end of the Shah's absolute monarchy became a reality, however, reports in Pakistan's leading newspapers embraced the self-affirming possibilities of an Islamic Iran. Under Zia ul-Haq's martial law, an aggressive Islamization program was taking root and the connections were made between the mutual struggles to create true Islamic states. "The triumph of Islam in Iran has been an

[425] *Dawn* editorial, Aug. 29, 1978, Karachi.

endorsement of Pakistan's own ideological basis and an inspiration to its current efforts to adopt the Islamic way of life," declared a Pakistan Times editorial.[426] Zia ul-Haq's government was one of the first to initial official ties with the new regime.

Yet the official enthusiasm for the revolutionary forces began to dim as it became clear that Iran's leaders did not intend their ideology to end at their borders. Tehran Radio's broadcasts began exhorting the people of Pakistan and Saudi Arabia to overthrow their systems, as neither were true iterations of a proper Islamic state. Media channels expressed anger that the Islamic credentials of the Pakistani state were being challenged. Indeed, the disillusionment with the revolution crystallized further with the triumph of conservative counterrevolutionary forces and Iran's new constitution stating that the official religion of Iran would be of Ithna' 'Ashari Islam. "On the face of it, this gives a second grade status of citizenship to persons subscribing to non-Asna [sic] Ashari beliefs," a worried letter to the editor mused.[427] Pakistan had itself constitutionally declared Ahmadis non-Muslims only years earlier, yet the discomfort with an avowedly Shi'a state would be increasingly evident.

Indeed, the mixed reactions to the Iranian Revolution made clear that what Islam and Islamization meant remained deeply unsettled, even for those who accepted the need for a greater role of religion in public life. The fear of Iran's Shi'a influence was realized when Shi'as refused to submit to Zia ul-Haq's new *Zakat* Ordinance, passed in June 1980.[428] The law called for the mandatory deduction of a *zakat* tax from all bank saving

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[426] *Pakistan Times* editorial, February 23, 1980, Lahore edition.
[427] "Letters to the editor," *Dawn* newspaper, August 29, 1980, Karachi edition.
[428] *Zakat* was a tax on the income and wealth of a Muslim, considered one of the five pillars of Islam. Sunni and Shi'a *fiqh* differ in their implementation – Shi'a Muslims pay *khums* instead, and are permitted to donate to a representative of the Imams.

accounts. Shi'as around Pakistan erupted into mass protests against the law, seen as a violation of their religious rights. On July 4th and 5th, 25,000 Shi'as marched on the capital and staged a sit-in to demand exemption from the ordinance, in defiance of martial law. It was through the support of Tehran that the exemption was granted, with Khomeini personally intervening to pressure Zia ul-Haq into a retreat.[429] Supported by Tehran, the protests against the *Zakat* Ordinance was the first mass-scale Shi'a movement in Pakistan's history and would spur the creation of new political parties dedicated solely to advancing Shi'a interests in Pakistan. The demonstrations were led by the highly-organized movement, the Tahrīk-i Nifaz-i Fiqh-i Ja'fariyya (Movement for the Implementation of the Ja'fari Law, which would remain a considerable force. Shi'a mobilization and challenges to the government's religious doctrine would have a direct effect on Bibi Pak Daman, where one Sunni resident complained to the Auqaf manager that Shi'as read out Khomeini's weekly Friday sermon (*khutba*), despite the prohibition on inflaming sectarian tensions.[430]

The tenuous sectarian and ethnic balance that Pakistan had managed in the decades since its independence would explode with the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan at the end of 1979 and the inpouring of military and foreign fighters.[431] The porous border

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[429] Vali Nasr, "The Rise of Sunni Militancy in Pakistan: The Changing Role of Islamism and the Ulama in Society and Politics," in *Modern Asian Studies,* Vol. 34, No. 1 (Feb. 2000), 155. According to Nasr, Zia ul-Haq was so angered by Shi'a demands and Khomeini's interference that it promoted the introduction of a provision into the constitution that made the condemnation of the first three caliphs of Islam – those Shi'as believe usurped 'Ali's mandated authority – a legal offense.

[430] Letter to Manager Auqaf, Central Zone, Lahore from Hammad Awan, Memo No. ACW-3-LW-84, Sept. 14, 1984, General Records of Darbar Hazrat Bibi Pak Daman, Lahore.

[431] Much has been written about the Afghan war and the funding of the *mujahideen*, or religious fighters, through Pakistan. For an overview, see Barnett R. Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan: State Formation and Collapse in the International System* (New Haven: Yale

and resulting waves of Afghan refugees had a damaging effect on economic inequality and the balance of ethnicities and power that make up the federating units of Pakistan. Most transformative to the realities on the ground, however, was the influx of money, primarily from the Gulf States, to fund religious schools (*madrasas*) and organizations devoted to promoting an Islamic public culture in Pakistan. These funds spawned a multiplying network of *madrasas*, many with the sole purpose of training its students for *jihad* (holy war). Their brand of conservative *Salafi* Sunni Islam would permeate public culture, aggressively promoting a strict interpretation of Islamization and coming into conflict with Sufi orders and Shi'a organizations. In Lahore alone, the increase in *madrasas* was fourfold in the 1980s.[432] Through Saudi Arabian funds, four Deobandi *madrasas* had been established in the Qila Gujjar Singh area by 1984; their presence would "greatly increase sectarian tensions at *darbar* Bibi Pak Daman," according an Auqaf manager. "*Ahl al-Shi'a* were upset at the volume of their *azān*, which was heard at Bibian Pak Daman. Many complained that [the *madrasas*] were deliberately inciting Shi'a-Sunni unrest."[433]

The dueling forces of increased Shi'a mobilization in the wake of the Iranian Revolution and the pressure from Gulf-backed conservative Sunni groups to further regulate public religiosity created a new milieu at the shrine. Debates over the appropriate range of activity at the shrine were given an added valence by the international strains on

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University Press, 1995) and "Arab Islamists in Afghanistan," in John L. Esposito (ed.), *Political Islam: Revolution, Radicalism, or Reform?* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1997), 179-206; Pervaiz Iqbal Cheema, "The Afghanistan Crisis and Pakistan's Security Dilemma," in *Asian Survey*, Vol. 23, No. 3 (Mar., 1983), 227-243; W. Howard Wriggins, "Pakistan's Search for a Foreign Policy After the Invasion of Afghanistan," in *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 57, No. 2 (Summer, 1984), pp. 284-303.

[432] Nasr, "The Rise of Sunni Militancy in Pakistan," 142.

[433] Field notes, interview with Sheikh Akhlaq, member RPC, July 22, 2012, Lahore.

Pakistan. Auqaf officials, local residents, Shi'a and Sunni devotees and organizations, and shopkeepers in the bazaar imposed their understanding of what the shrine meant. With uneasy or hostile relationships with Iran, Afghanistan, and India on Pakistan's borders causing internal instability, Reactions over how Islam was projected in rituals at Bibi Pak Daman and its bazaar were weighted with that context.

"A Masterpiece of Islamic Architecture"

In early 1979 the Sayyeda Zaynab shrine committee met with the Syrian Ministry of Awqaf to pass a bill to allow the shrine to expand and meet the increasing needs of pilgrims. Under recommendations from the Awqaf Ministry and the Ministry of Housing, the shrine committee allocated the necessary budgets and bought 150,000 square meters of real estate surrounding the existing shrine, to be used for pilgrims' comfort and establish new parks and gardens to beautify the area. The expansion would increase the area of sacred space, expanding the *haram* (inner shrine), the courtyard, and allow new properties to be dedicated solely towards the creation of a self-sufficient shrine city.[434] Yet while the shrine committee had help from a cadre of individual supporters who had continued to raise funds and awareness on their behalf, including Mahdi Bahbahani and representatives from Iraq and Lebanon, it was the new government in Iran that paid outright for the land.[435]

Shrine administrators had found a receptive audience in Iran's desire to export its revolutionary ideology, as investing and remaking holy spaces – shrines, mosques, and

[434] Copy of Decree No. 995, 11 May 1979, Folder 13, Majma' al-Sayyeda Zaynab li al-Ma'lūmāt wa al-Abhāth, Murtadha Family Private Papers, Sitt Zaynab, Syria.
[435] *ibid* and Amendment, Folder 13, Majma' al-Sayyeda Zaynab li al-Ma'lūmāt wa al-Abhāth, Murtadha Family Private Papers, Sitt Zaynab, Syria.

religious schools – was key in its cultural agenda.[436] Hani Murtadha, a *mutawalli* of the Sayyeda Zaynab, had traveled to Iran with a government delegation in late 1978 and presented the issues facing the shrine to officials from Iran's Ministry of Culture and Higher Education. He noted that despite the growing popularity of the site, "there was room for only 9 more graves [and] for Muslims being buried near Sayyeda Zaynab is of huge importance." The committee needed financing for legal and engineering efforts for new graveyards in the north and east, he informed them, as droves of Shi'a from Syria, Lebanon, Afghanistan, Iraq and Pakistan were bequeathing in their wills to be buried at the shrine. The practice of Shi'a Muslims choosing to be buried in the sacred spaces of their faith was a common one, for those who could afford the high price of demand. Yet the holy graveyards of Najaf, Karbala, Samarra, and Kadhimiya in Iraq were off-limits in a deadly war, and Zaynab and Damascus were a powerful link to the events of Karbala. That the demand for graves at the shrine was surpassing the availability of 'sacred' land owned by the shrine was indicative of the devotion and popularity of Zaynab in Shi'a communities worldwide. As such, an information center and library was also needed "to give information and enlighten visitors on the lives and character of the *Ahl ul-Bayt*," and

[436] The extent to which Iran was engaged with and successful in exporting its particular brand of revolutionary is a topic that continues to be debated, in light of its sustained tensions with Saudi Arabia over spheres of influence. For more see "Khomeini Urges Export of Iranian Revolution," *The New York Times,* October 15, 1981; Roschanack Shaery Eisenlohr, "Iran, the Vatican of Shi'ism," in *Middle East Report,* No. 233 (Winter 2004), 40-42 and "Post Revolutionary Iran and Shi'a Lebanon: Contested Histories of Shi'i Transnationalism," in *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 39 (2007), 271-289; Hafizullah Emadi, "Exporting Iran's Revolution: The Radicalization of the Shiite Movement in Afghanistan," in *Middle Eastern Studies,* Vol. 31, No. 1, Jan. 1995; Ruhi Ramazani, "Iran's Export of the Revolution: Its Politics, Ends, and Means," in *The Iranian Revolution: Its Global Impact,* ed. John Esposito (Miami: Florida International University Press, 1990), 40-62 and *Independence without Freedom: Iran's Foreign Policy* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press), 2013.

a modern hospital and hiring of doctors was required to manage the loads of *za'ireen* in all states of health and age.[437]

(Figure 5.1: The new graveyard in 1983)

The shrine committee welcomed the direct Iranian involvement and influence, without the financial means to truly capitalize on the popularity of Zaynab and create a shrine to rival the Iraqi and Iranian sites. Yet they were also able to earn the secular Ba'athist government's acquiescence of expansion plans and the direct involvement of

[437] Hani Murtadha, "Syed Hani Murtadha, Mutawalli al-Maqām al-Sharīf," *al-Mawsim,* 1, No. 4 (1989), 78.

Iranian money, surprising in a state that had a delicate relationship with public religiosity. On the face of it, it was remarkable that the regime, so sensitive to the mistrust of its majority Sunni citizens, would immediately allow the Iranian government to advance its agenda.[438] Yet it was the Murtadha family's deep ties that allowed them to maintain a national face to the shrine and create greater permissiveness for international involvement, even while constructing a swelling Shi'a enclave in the capital. Indeed, there remained a difference between the non-Syrian leaders (militants, refugees, and *ulama*) who used the Sayyeda Zaynab as political proxy and the local notables who had an investment in the stability of the political order and had ties to Syrian Shi'a community. For the state, the Murtadha family represented a bulwark of influence and constancy, allowing them to capitalize on the economic gains of a popular shrine city. In turn, the *mutawalli* of the shrine gained prestige and international influence not usually accorded to Syria's small Twelver Shi'a community, one that had been overshadowed by the Alawi rise to power.

The financial and political support for the Sayyeda Zaynab shrine was distinct from other sites under the Ministry of Awqaf in the 1970s and 1980s, all under much stricter state control. Anthropologist Yasser Tabbaa has explored the conflict that emerged concurrently over the Sayyeda Ruqayya shrine, the purported gravesite of

[438] Syria's deteriorating relations with the Muslim Brotherhood heightened the sectarian context. From 1976, Sunni Islamists had fought a campaign against the Ba'athist state and had been gaining in strength. As a result, the regime responded in brutal retaliation, including making membership in the Muslim Brotherhood punishable by death. In February 1982, the Syrian army besieged the city of Hama for 27 days. The resulting massacre essentially wiped out the Muslim Brotherhood as a viable national influence. See Yvette Talhamy, "The Syrian Muslim Brothers and the Syrian-Iranian Relationship," *Middle East Journal,* Vol. 63, No. 4 (Autumn, 2009), 561-580.

Husayn's young daughter that died in captivity in Damascus. The Sayyeda Ruqayya shrine was located in Old Damascus, in the midst of the Souq Al-Hamidiya where Yazid's prison had been located. In the early 1980s, a backlash began from local residents, merchants, and the Syrian Department of Antiquities and Museums against an aggressive expansion and rebuilding effort directed by the Iranian state.[439] Building an ornate new Shi'a shrine came into conflict with the desire to preserve cultural heritage, as this area of Umayyad "Old Damascus" had immense cultural and historic significance and was protected by the Laws of Antiquities and the Law for the Protection of the Ancient City of Damascus. According to Tabbaa, letters from the Director General of Antiquities and Museums to the Prime Minister outlined the various problems that the expansion of Sayyeda Ruqayyah would create for the traditional life of walled Damascus, and tensions between Antiquities and Awqaf officials grew heated.[440]

In contrast, the massive expansion of the Sayyeda Zaynab drew considerably less ire, despite the large-scale developments funded by Iran and the dislocation of residents and businesses. The distinction lay in how the Sayyeda Zaynab was likely viewed within Syria. Despite languishing in relative disrepair and obscurity, the Ruqayya shrine was part of an old, downtown, 'authentic' Damascus, and the valuing of 'old' cultural heritage was viewed as a sign of modernity. Its location near the Umayyad palace gave it a defined historical importance. In contrast, the Sayyeda Zaynab claimed a much longer

[439] Tabbaa, "Invented Pieties," 111. One such letter came in 1982 from Najah Attar, the Minister of Culture, asking for a stoppage of works. It was Attar who spent significant time with Benazir Bhutto in her 1996 visit to the Sayyeda Zaynab, guiding her on the new progress made at the shrine. Despite al-Attar's involvement with the Ba'ath leadership, her brother, Issam al-Attar, was the Supreme Guide of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood from 1963-1980 and exiled from Syria since the Ba'athist takeover.
[440] Tabbaa, "Invented Pieties," 29.

tradition, with references to the site dating back before the 12th century, yet it occupied an ambiguous space. It was not covered by preservation laws, removing it from the tensions of cultural heritage, a pressing concern for newly independent states constructing an unbroken historical narrative for themselves. Its previous underdevelopment, emphasized by the *maraji'* in their appeals for better conditions, and location in the outskirts of Damascus had placed it in a state of 'in-betweenness;' the sense that the shrine formed a frontier between authentic Damascus and the foreign 'other' only grew as scores more pilgrims began to visit the shrine. A Damascene businessman who had moved from Homs in 1981 with his family and owned a travel agency not far from Marjeh Square embodied that sense. He noted that he had never been to the Sayyeda Zaynab area, nor did he know of anyone who frequented the area. "For what?" he noted dismissively. The area had been full of "foreigners" and those who felt no loyalty to the country, those displaced that had flooded in since the 1970s. He explained, "It is very different from Damascus."[441] The 'othering' of the Sayyeda Zaynab nevertheless allowed its expansion to proceed with little challenge.[442]

Indeed, even as local Syrian Twelver Shi'as continue to frame the site as a national landmark, Iranian money and engineering would dramatically transform the

[441] Field notes, interview with Muhammad Khatem, March 15, 2012, Damascus.
[442] The civil war in Syria was raging during my fieldwork in 2012, yet as a result locals were more inclined to share their opinions and stories with me, impressed that a foreigner had ventured into their country and sought to understand more. Our young and stylish hotel receptionist, Rihab, had taken a liking to us, especially with entire floors sitting empty of visitors. On one occasion, she offered to drive us from the Sayyeda Zaynab into Old Damascus. When the car reached the main throughway, about mile away from the shrine, she discarded her hijab into the back seat. "Of course we dress like this in Sitt Zaynab, you know? It is for respect." The area was a holy site for Muslims like her, she explained, so she followed its customs. "But no one dresses like this in proper Damascus." Rihab believed that the Sayyeda Zaynab existed as a distinct milieu from the Damascus she understood, yet she acceptance of the norms of the Sayyeda Zaynab.

Sayyeda Zaynab into a recognizably Shi'a space. Iranian designs altered the aesthetics of the inside spaces, with high ceilings and gilded interiors meant to covey a sense of spiritual wonder and "the greatness of Allah."[443] Two minarets, built at 50 meters high and engraved with all the attributes of Allah, the names of the Shi'a infallibles, and decorated with exquisite stonework, were erected by 1981. By 1984, the outside

(Figure 5.2: New Iranian funded inner dome)

[443] *Sūwar al-haram al-sharif*, Photographs, Folder 13, Majma' al-Sayyeda Zaynab li al-Ma'lūmāt wa al-Abhāth, Murtadha Family Private Papers, Sitt Zaynab, Syria.

(Figure 5.3: New marble courtyards)

courtyard had been expanded and laid with imported white marble and the inner dome and arches engraved and inlaid in colorful Iranian tile work. The style of architecture had become a signature of Iranian investment in renovating Shi'a shrines and holy spaces, visually marking the Sayyeda Zaynab as a transnational Shi'a shrine in the mold of Qom and Mashhad.

(Figure 5.4: New minarets)

Revolutionary Iran's support was not just about finances or aesthetics, however. According to a senior Murtadha family member, "The support of our brothers [from Iran] was important to confirm for all Ithna' Ashari Shi'i that this was the only accepted grave location of Sayyeda Zaynab."[444] As an avowedly Islamic state, Iran's acceptance of the shrine authenticated and sacralized the site for Shi'a Muslims, delegitimizing other locations and sanctioning *ziyārat* to this site.

Yet if urban Damascene citizens were more likely to view the expansion of the Sayyeda Zaynab with indifference, or as part of the 'backwards' outskirts of the city, its 'in-betweenness' still provided a powerful tool in Islamic rhetoric. For Syrian Twelver Shi'as, the ornamentation of the shrine emphasized the grandness of space, the importance of *ziyārat* to the shrine, but also the sense of spectacle that transcended narrow sectarian definitions. According to Muhammad Bashir Zahdi, chair of the National Museum and professor at University of Damascus, "It is one of the most important shrines of the Islamic world and a masterpiece of Islamic architecture...To witness the beauty of the shrine is to capture your awe."[445] In an introduction to a volume published on the Sayyeda Zaynab by the Ministry of Culture, the site was described as a paragon of Islamic architecture and history, "in the heart of the Arabs. In Iraq we see the destruction of holy places…its historical manuscripts are being burned, and these magnificent structures that are deeply rooted in its culture are being damaged and

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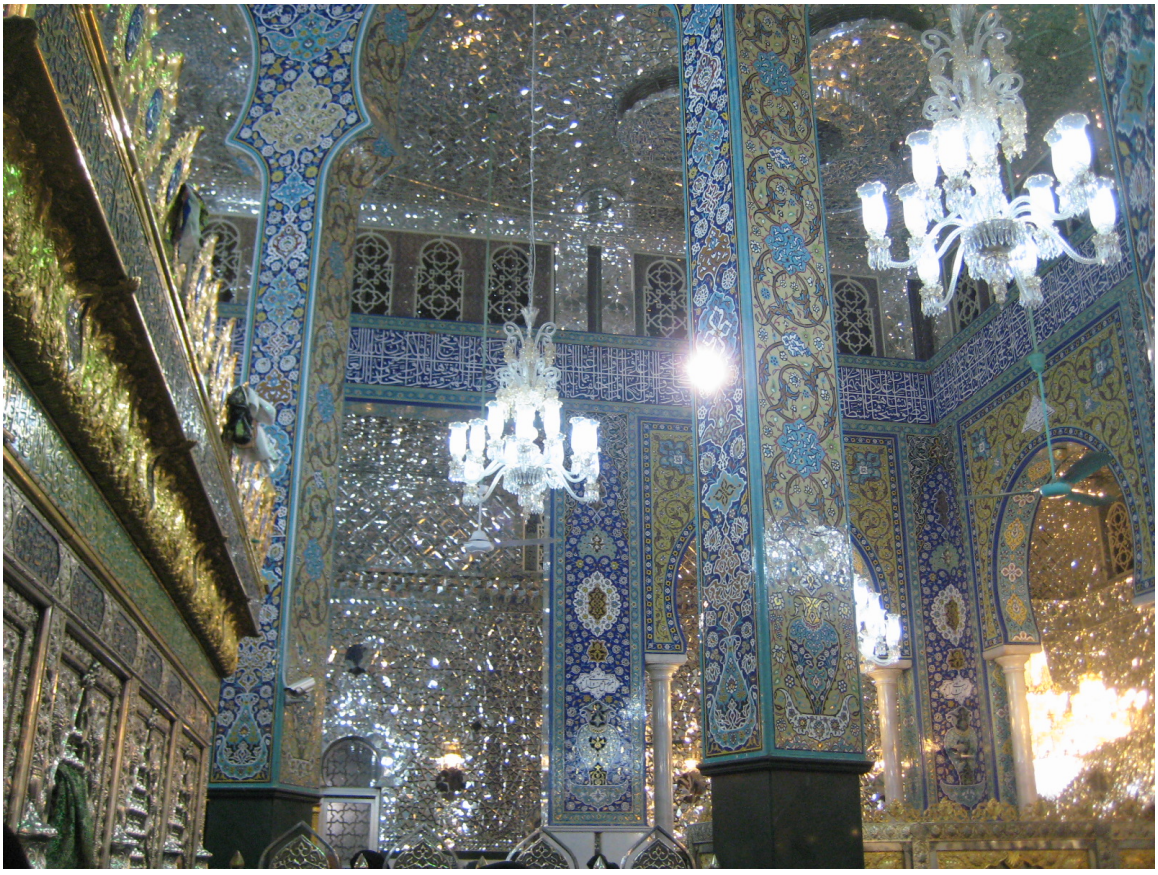
[444] Field notes, interview with a senior Murtadha family member and head engineer at the Sayyeda Zaynab, March 12, 2012, Damascus. The subject requested to remain unnamed. As custodians of the shrine, the relatives of Hani and Mohammad Radha Murtadha traveled under strict police protection, with regular threats to the Sayyeda Zaynab shrine forcing many to send their families out of Syria.

[445] Muhammad Bashir Zahdi, "Maqām al-Sayyeda Zaynab al-Kubrā fi madinah al-Sayyeda Zaynab: Tarīkh 'inshiya' al-maqām wa anhār al-saqf al-qadīm." *al-Mawsim,* 1, No. 4 (1989), 173.

destroyed."[446] The Sayyeda Zaynab, a modest shrine just decades earlier, had been entirely remade by transnational influences and inhabited by a new mix of locals, students, and Shi'a refugees, yet was positioned by Syrian Shi'as as a national beacon. The efforts to improve the shrine represented a struggle "for our nation's civilization and the protection of its culture, pride, and glorious history."[447] Unlike Syria's Ba'athist rival Iraq, which was intent on destroying its cultural heritage, the new Sayyeda Zaynab was recast as an example of Syria's great Arab and Islamic heritage.



(Figure 5.5: The new shrine)

[446] Muhammad Sa'id al-Tahiri, "Introduction," *al-Mawsim,* xi.
[447] *ibid*, "Introduction," *al-Mawsim,* xii.

The Religious Tourist at the Sayyeda Zaynab

By the early 1980s, the groundwork to create a major Shi'a shrine to rival Najaf and Karbala had been laid by the shrine committee in its appeals to the leading *maraji'*, bureaucrats, and allies. Undoubtedly, the shrine was carefully managed to rival the major Shi'a pilgrimage sites; it was a sacred space that emerged in the modern nation-state context, onto which various interests could enforce their ideological agendas. While the importance of the Sayyeda Zaynab in part grew from geopolitical impulses, with the shrine growing as a rival to Najaf, Karbala, and Qom in periods of great instability, the broader appeal of *ziyārat* to the Sayyeda Zaynab cannot be reduced simply to this. Indeed, the shrine committee's recognition of the need for more graveyard space in 1979 implies that Shi'as already viewed the shrine as a most sacred site and a desired final resting place for devotees of the *Ahl al-Bayt*. The complex appeals of the Sayyeda Zaynab were both personal and political; *ziyārat* became institutionalized with state patronage, but *za'ireen*, merchants, and locals adapted it individually and framed new ways of engaging with the site.

With Syrian and Iranian relations growing closer in the early 1980s, both states invested in *ziyārat* to Damascus by making it easier and cheaper relative to other sacred sites.[448] In March 1982, Syria and Iran signed trade and tourism agreements through which Syria received oil at low cost and Iran was granted the right to send religious

[448] The anthropologist Sabrina Mervin labeled it the "pilgrimage of the poor" (*hajj al-fuqara*), accessible to those who could not travel to Mecca or the shrines in Iraq for a variety of reasons. Mervin, "Sayyida Zaynab: Bainlieu de Damas ou nouvelle ville sainte chiite?", 151.

tourists to Damascus, up to one thousand visitors a week.[449] The vast majority of these pilgrims were sponsored by the Iranian Martyr's Foundation (*Bonyad Shahid va Omur-e Janbazan*), which paid for mothers and widows of the 'martyred' soldiers of the Iran-Iraq war to receive subsidized trips to the Sayyeda Zaynab shrine to compensate and mourn for their loss. The Iranian regime supplied these families with cash, and in turn the Syrian government provided pilgrims with housing, food, and transportation during their visit to the Sayyeda Zaynab. A whole new infrastructure was built to accommodate the mass increase in *ziyārat* to the shrine. Saeb Nahas, a wealthy Syrian businessman, established Transtour, the first state-approved group operator for the Sayyeda Zaynab. Transtour handled the Iranian pilgrims almost exclusively in the 1980s, securing accommodations and managing the itinerary of visits to Syria's sacred sites; according to the Syrian Ministry of Culture, Nahas and the organization performed a critical "economic service" to the nation, allowing Syria to capitalize on the "deep devotion for Zaynab al-Kubra."[450] This was the beginning of the religious tourist to the Sayyeda Zaynab – religious pilgrims who traveled in organized groups, were managed by itineraries, engaged in both commerce and Shi'a rituals, and returned home with souvenirs to remind them of the blessings of *ziyārat*.

Zaynab's shrine had an undeniably powerful resonance for the Iranian revolution's leaders, including as the site of Shari'ati's grave, and her life provided an ideal paradigm to justify and encourage the wide scale sacrifice of young Iranian men. If Khomeini valued Fatima as an exemplar of Shi'a femininity, during the war it was

[449] David Ottoway, "Move Offsets Drop in Arab Support: Syria Turns to Iran as Political, Financial Ally," *The Washington Post,* December 29, 1983.
[450] "Sharika al-Sayyida Zaynab li al-siyāha wa al-ziyāra mashrū' al-majma 'al funduqī", *al-Mawsim*, 25.

Zaynab who became a commanding trope. To monitor the public and the advances of conservative counterrevolutionary forces, the state formed a female unit known as the *Khaharan-e Zaynab* (or Sisters of Zaynab) to police women's public modesty, organize mass demonstrations, and work in mosques to prepare medicine, repair soldiers' clothing, and send food for men on the front lines.[451] Zaynab's birthday was declared "Nurses' Day" during the Iraq War, with posters and postage stamps issued for the occasion.[452] There was an extraordinary pressure mounted on a public and social level to inspire a sense of the righteousness in the mass deaths of soldiers, especially for Iranian women to willingly sacrifice in the way that Zaynab knowingly sent her sons, nephews, brothers, and companions to die in the name of a true Islam.[453] A pilgrimage to the Sayyeda Zaynab was to give these women a religious grounding to accept their loss, effectively tying them to one of the most revered figures in Shi'ism. Yet while the initial impetus behind these groups may have been political, their overwhelming popularity and the increase in individual visits suggests that *za'ireen* saw some potential spiritual or social gain from the experience. These *ziyārat* groups also gave these women some small degree of freedom from the constraints they experienced in their daily lives. Though traveling within a supervised structure, these women were often permitted to make the

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[451] Maryam Poya, *Women, Work, and Islamism: Ideology and Resistance in Iran* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 78-80.
[452] Peter Chelkowski, "Iconography of the Women of Karbala: Tile, Murals, Stamps, and Posters," in *The Women of Karbala: Ritual Performance and Symbolic Discourses in Moden Shi'i Iran,* ed. Kamran Scot Aghaie (Austin: The University of Texas Press, 2005).
[453] See Faegeh Shirazi, "The Daughters of Karbala: Images of Women in Popular Shi'i Culture in Iran," in *The Women of Karbala,* 2005. The rhetoric used to justify the Iranian losses would later inspire a new genre of film and literature in Iran. Marjane Satrapi, for example, would famously capture the sense of comic tragedy in the destruction of a generation by depicting the gold-plated 'key to heaven' that poor young soldiers were given, her indictment of the false honor they were given by the religious guard. See Marjane Satrapi, *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood* (New York: Pantheon, 2004).

trips independently, without individual male companions, and were able to socialize with each other in the shrine and bazaar.[454] Visiting the Sayyeda Zaynab shrine gave them the opportunity to engage with multiple identities – as Shi'as in a sacred space, as Iranians participating in an act of national validation, as women collectively visiting the site of a female saint, and as individuals who would construct individual meaning.

Indeed, by the early 1980s, the women arriving at the Sayyeda Zaynab in sponsored buses from Iran would encounter a different reality on the ground. The shrine committee had allowed the shrine to turn into a transnational space in a relatively short space of time, with the tacit acquiescence of the largely secular Syrian regime. From the sparse plains of Karbala, Zaynab's shrine had grown into a bustling commercial space, with a new aesthetic, visual culture, and an enlarged bazaar. As part of the planned expansion, the shrine committee "created an initial allotment of a bazaar of 25000 meters to fulfill the needs of the pilgrims, with 50 shops and 100 vendors, so that seasonal objects can be sold."[455] A member of the shrine committee explained the reasoning behind the planning of the bazaar,

> We felt we must make Sitt Zaynab a place that *za'ireen* from all over the world will make a first choice as a spiritual destination. For the Shi'i, Praise Be to God, we can earn *barakat* from visiting many different places, all over the world, even those places where the descendants of the Imams have visited. Of course, the shrine of Zaynab bint 'Ali is different, as [she is] the great victor of Karbala. It is a great honor to those who can come to sit inside the *haram* and pay respect through her to the *Ahl al-Bayt*. But they must be able to find conditions that match their needs. We must supply them with places to purchase prayer books and rugs, *chador*, *aqīq* [garnet rings], and gifts for family to share their blessings, all central

[454] Tabbaa, "Invented Pieties," 111.
[455] Copy of Amendment of Decree No. 995, 11 July 1981, Folder 13, Majma' al-Sayyeda Zaynab li al-Ma'lūmāt wa al-Abhāth, Murtadha Family Private Papers, Sitt Zaynab, Syria.

> within the holy grounds of the shrine…The shops had to be part of the sacred land of Sitt Zaynab.[456]

The argument mirrors the responsiveness of *marja'* to concerns about comfort through the 1950s and 1960s and reveals a concerted desire to transform *ziyārat* to the Sayyeda Zaynab into a spiritually and physically appealing experience. The ability to buy and sell faith and pilgrimage created new ways for devotees to imagine and interact with Zaynab and her shrine. The link between the bazaar and pilgrimage was certainly not a new invention of the Sayyeda Zaynab, as commerce had been a central part of the growth of *ziyārat* to Shi'a shrines. However, at the Sayyeda Zaynab, the planned expansion of the bazaar had a different resonance and a unique link with Zaynab's story. One of the central traumas and recurring motifs of the Karbala story is the parading of the female survivors through the bazaar outside the Umayyad palace. The bazaar was decorated for the arrival, with shopkeepers and residents of Damascus cramming in to the space to see the prisoners. Zaynab and the other women of Husayn's household were de-veiled and made to endure hours of ridicule and public spectacle, for these were people that supported Yazid's victory. The bazaar was the heart of Yazid's cruelty and debauchery, the space where the contrast with female piety became clearest. This narrative was turned on its head at the Sayyeda Zaynab shrine, where throughout the 1980s the bazaar was established and sacralized as part of the shrine space, endorsed by its caretakers and selling religious goods to satisfy the demands of pilgrims. Because the bazaar served the needs of devotees, it became part of the sacred geography of the shrine, a natural extension of the blessings derived at the shrine. While the Hamidiyah bazaar around the

[456] Field notes, interview with a senior Murtadha family member, March 12, 2012, Damascus.

Umayyad mosque was a symbol of tyranny and sorrow for the family of the *Ahl al-Bayt,* the growing industry around the Sayyeda Zaynab would become a space where Shi'a pilgrims could buy and assert their identity.

The bazaar grew under the de facto control of the shrine committee, which issued permits to prospective merchants and collected rent revenue from the stalls. Yet while the stated purpose of the bazaar was to provide necessities to pilgrims, the boundaries of what that entailed remained unclear. One such permit, issued in October 1984, noted that the particular stall would be selling "prayer rugs, *ittar* perfume, prayer books," among other items. The stall, like much of the land in the bazaar, was rented to its shop owner, Ayyub, for a long-term lease, but all land would be returned to the shrine or renegotiated after a period of 25 years.[457] Despite the descriptions on the permit of items that could be categorized as primarily related to ritual use, both at the shrine and in domestic spaces, the bazaar would soon take on a busy life of its own. Very soon after receiving his permit, Ayyub noted that the demand from the *za'ireen* meant that he could stock more than his prayer mats and perfume and encountered no opposition from shrine officials. Indeed, the increasing number of foreign visitors who brought disposable income with them gave him leeway to expand his offerings to match the demand for souvenirs and more conventional items. Iranian pilgrims brought trade with them as well, setting up makeshift stalls to sell pistachios and using their earnings to buy American and foreign

[457] Field notes, interview with Ayyub, March 7, 2012, Damascus. All names of interview subjects have been changed in this chapter, as fieldwork was conducted during the war in Syria and tensions around the Sayyeda Zaynab were heightened with the growing sectarian nature of the conflict. Shrine documents presented lease guidelines as between 25-40 years, depending on size of plot.

manufactured products that were officially banned at home.[458] The Sayyeda Zaynab formed a different frontier for these pilgrims, allowing them to access their Shi'a identity but expand their spiritual and consumption horizons beyond their national boundaries. Many would use the profit earned by reselling goods to finance the costs of *ziyārat*; the Iranian State agency Bonjade Mostafasan, funded with the shah's confiscated wealth, charged the martyr's family members "750 for a one-week pilgrimage to Damascus that covers the flight, hotel and $150 in Syrian-currency pocket money."[459] Yet the purchase of goods from the Sayyeda Zaynab bazaar would imbue these items with a sense of religious approval; this bazaar was morally superior, approved by the shrine committee on the sacred land of the shrine and a direct contrast to the Hamidiya *souq* that secular tourists would frequent. Within a year of obtaining a permit, imported watches quickly became Ayyub's most popular items. Pilgrims wanted to give useful gifts that still retained the *barakat* of the Sayyeda Zaynab, he explained. An item used daily "would remind them of al-Sayyeda all the time" – a logic that could extend the boundaries of 'blessed' items to anything bought and sold in the bazaar. Ayyub watched the rapid transformation firsthand. Merchants quickly realized that shrine officials would take a loose approach to monitoring the content of goods sold, he explained. As long as nothing sold was "forbidden" (*mamnū'*), those who received their permits for "religious goods very soon changed their stock" to accommodate the pilgrims who wanted to spend their savings in the shadow of the holy shrine. "Better here," he affirmed, echoing a prevalent

[458] Richard Bernstein, "Syria and Iran are Nurturing a Wary, Ambiguous Alliance," *The New York Times*, July 5, 1985.
[459] Uli Schmetzer, "Survival outweighs even heavenly honor in pilgrims' prayers," *The Chicago Tribune,* April 20, 1987.

sentiment. The revenue would help merchants pay their rent, and that rent went to the Sayyeda Zaynab shrine committee to continue to improve the shrine.

(Figure 5.6: A stall in the bazaar)

The expansion and the diversification of the Sayyeda Zaynab bazaar was not a unique phenomenon amongst Shi'a shrines in the 1980s, especially in the wake of the Iranian Revolution and the new regime's funding of a distinct assertive aesthetic at mosques and shrines abroad. The trade in souvenirs emerged at Karbala through the commodification of 'sacred ground;' Meir Litvak has noted that by the 19th century, the production and sale of religious trinkets was a main component of local industry in Karbala, even to the chagrin of some more conservative *ulama* that rejected

commoditizing sacred experience.[460] At a larger scale, similar marketplaces operated in Mashhad, Iran, where the city's economy was dependent on its relationship with the largest mosque in the world and in a country where the link between bazaar and *ulama* was historically strong, as it was at Shi'a shrine sites.[461] Yet while the purchase of souvenirs was encouraged in Iran through a state system based on Shi'ism, or in Karbala through the influence of old merchant-*ulama* families, the example of the Sayyeda Zaynab in Syria was unique. 'Religious consumption' in the new bazaar was directly planned between the Shi'a shrine committee and the Syrian government, which had a substantial economic interest in adapting an accommodating attitude to *ziyārat*, and framed within Zaynab's own Karbala narrative. It turned the Sayyeda Zaynab region into a self-sufficient outpost of Damascus. The pilgrims and scholars who would frequent the shrine would have no pressing needs to venture into the main city, further cementing the divide between the new shrine space and the older, 'modern' urban spaces. In 1986, Mohammad Ali Rizvi, a Shi'a Pakistani student arrived at the Jamiat al-Muntazar. "For many months I never traveled to Damascus – I never found a good reason," he noted. Interestingly, Mohammad chose to distinguish Damascus as a separate urban entity; the distance between the Sayyeda Zaynab and Damascus was not just a physical one. While

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[460] Meir Litvak, "The Finances of the 'Ulama' Communities of Najaf and Karbala," 60.
[461] Afshin Molavi, *Persian Pilgrimages: Journeys Across Iran* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2002). According to Keddie, "The bazaar has long been the economic, social, and religious center of towns and cities." See Nikki Keddie, "Iranian Revolutions in Comparative Perspective," in *The American Historical Review,* Vol. 88, No. 3 (June, 1983), 579-598; See also Ahmad Ashraf, "Bazaar-Mosque Alliance: The Social Basis of Revolts and Revolutions," in *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society,* Vol. 1, No. 4 (Summer, 1988), 538-567; Meir Litvak, "Continuity and Change in the Ulama Population of Najaf and Karbala, 1791-1904: A Socio-Demographic Study," in *Iranian Studies,* Vol. 23, No. ¼ (1990), 31-60; Mansoor Moaddel, "Shi'i Political Discourse and Class Mobilization in the Tobacco Movement of 1890-1892," in *Sociological Forum*, Vol. 7, No. 3 (Sep. 1992), 447-468.

the Sayyeda Zaynab has long officially been defined as within the confines of greater Damascus, even pointedly referred to as part of the great Arab capital by Mushin al-Amīn and the Murtadha family, Mohammad's distinction between where he resided and Damascus created a mental demarcation between a secular city and the shrine life he knew. Mohammad's view of the Sayyeda Zaynab provided an inverted mirror to the reasoning of the Damascene travel agent who felt no need to interact with the foreignness of the Sayyeda Zaynab. While Muhsin al-Amīn and the Murtadha family had taken great pains to emphasize the ties to an Arab or national character, the shrine was now part of a geography of its own.

Thus, the scenes of a modern sectarian pilgrimage that emerged from the early 1980s and expanded through political and financial support challenged the idea of a dichotomy between faith and materiality, a distinction that had been emphasized by the imams in their early tracts on *ziyārat*. According to sayings attributed to the sixth Imam, Ja'far al-Sādiq, any Shi'a undertaking *ziyārat* of Husayn's shrine was advised to be "in a state of intense grief, with tearful eyes, appearance of being battered with calamities, in a state of thirst and starvation" and were warned to observe a very '"basic diet."[462] The almost wretched description of the ideal pilgrim, one who shunned all physical comfort, was a stark contrast with the explicit reasoning behind the creation of the *souq*. Yet the concern for ease or the importance of proper physical conditions was not new, with similar arguments driving the expansion and improvements made at the shrine throughout the 1950s. Often framed in the language of a religious and spiritual responsibility, these projects also made the Sayyeda Zaynab a more desirable destination for Shi'a pilgrims.

[462] Ibn Qulawayh, *Kāmil al-Ziyarat,* 265

The development of the bazaar and the establishment of first officially sanctioned *ziyārat* tour groups in the 1980s, however, projected the shrine outwards into a transnational space. Saeb Nahas' investment grew substantially in the Sayyeda Zaynab area and was the face behind much of the commercial development around the shrine, including the establishment of the Safir al-Sayyeda Zaynab, the first higher end hotel built in the area. In 1988, Nahas founded a commission "for economic coordination between Syria and Iran," with the purpose of building a large hotel and commercial complex close to the Sayyeda Zaynab, where foreign pilgrims could benefit from the kind of organized services that were still lacking. A note from the *mutawalli,* Hani Murtadha, to Nahas noted the commission "did significant work for the nation" and "the Arabs of his sect."[463] The focus on the nation and of Nahas as an Arab is noteworthy. Nahas was one of Syria's most wealthy businessman, from a prominent Twelver Shi'a family – a lineage that the shrine committee emphasized against charges that they were beholden to Alawi and Iranian influences. He was among the small percentage of notable Syrian Shi'a who were involved in the shrine affairs, in a period when resistance to Iranian influence and Alawi control of the regime had broken out into violent confrontations. "Nahas had what we say is 'hasab and nasab,'" a member of the Murtadha family explained, invoking an Arabic phrase to note someone's lofty status, both in the inherited noble qualities of ancestry and in direct lineage and genealogy. "It was important for Syed Hani and Syed Radha to have a face just like ours for the development of our lady's shrine. All of Sayyeda Zaynab's *za'ireen* come because she calls them. We are only here to serve them. But [Nahas] made

[463] Memo from Hani Murtadha to Commission of economic coordination between Syria and Iran, attn: Saeb Nahas. Majma' al-Sayyeda Zaynab li al-Ma'lūmāt wa al-Abhāth, Murtadha Family Private Papers, Sitt Zaynab, Syria. Note: the word "shi'a" was used, which as a general noun also refers to a sect, in addition to the Shi'a as a proper noun.

it more simple to develop the shrine, because he is Arab, and from a well-known family."[464] The reliance on Saeb Nahas, both financially and as a figurehead, reveals the importance to the Murtadha family of maintaining Syrian Twelver Shi'a control on the space. While the land bought for expansion was financed by Iran and money from foreign pilgrims helped fund the growth of the bazaar, having an Arab Shi'a ally take on a key development role validated the space as important to national interests and allowed the Murtadha family to continue their work. In turn, Nahas' investment in tour groups and hotel complexes was a business move, not limited simply by religious sentiment, and illustrated the appeal of *ziyārat* on an economic level.

Buying Barkat

Indeed, as authorities and merchants encouraged the tourist experience as part of *ziyārat* to the Sayyeda Zaynab, for visitors the purchase of souvenirs and keepsakes became a critical part of completing and memorializing the pilgrimage. While Ayyub and other merchants quickly found that pilgrims and shrine authorities alike had no qualms with expanding the range of offerings in the bazaar, it was still the posters depicting scenes from Karbala, wall hangings stitched with *hadith* and Qurānic verses, prayer beads, and other religious trinkets that remained the most popular items. In content and form, these items were not substantially different that those sold in other locations – indeed, many plastic prayers beads were manufactured in bulk, with identical designs

[464] Field notes, interview with a senior Murtadha family member, March 12, 2012, Damascus. He stated further that the land that the Safir hotel stood on had become extremely valuable with the rise of *ziyārat*, valuable beyond the rate that Nahas was given to entice development. "Keeping in mind that the land is extremely valuable and the gains were not sufficient, we undertook renegotiations with partners in the 1990s to reach an agreement to give a reasonable share. After 40 years, the hotel will return to the shrine in totality," he noted.

sold in other locations in Damascus.[465] Yet these objects gained meaning from their context, perpetuating the experience of pilgrimage and solidifying the purchaser's active participation in a broader community of believers. As Colleen McDannnell has argued, many individuals used these mass-produced items in highly personalized, meaningful ways that lend the object a 'traditional' or 'hand-crafted' function.[466]

The importance of the commodity in both the construction of identity and the delineation of group boundaries has been discussed extensively in an expanding literature on material culture, as well as an emerging emphasis on the role of consumer goods in promoting nationalist sentiment in the Middle East.[467] At Sayyeda Zaynab, both shrine authorities and visitors alike echoed the significance of purchasing souvenirs and the value placed on the religious token, as the ethos of the religious consumer became an ingrained part of the *ziyārat* experience. Promotional material published by the shrine committee discussed the wide-ranging items that could be bought in the surrounding bazaars, from "tape recordings of world-famous Qurānic readers to quality silver rings made with the holy stones of *durhe-Najaf*."[468] A pamphlet published and distributed by

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[465] Another merchant at the Sayyeda Zaynab bazaar, Ibrahim Haddad, mentioned his cousin owned a similar stall at Souq Hamidiyya and they shared stock. He noted that while many similar stores stocked cheaper quality beads imported from Turkey and China, they guaranteed their stock came directly from Iran and Iraq, "from Qom and Najaf only." Field notes, March 13, 2012, Damascus.

[466] Colleen McDannell, *Religion and Popular Culture in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995).

[467] For relevant literature on theories of material culture, see Arjun Appadurai, ed. *The Social Life of Things* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986) and Susan Strasser, ed. *Commodifying Everything* (New York: Routledge, 2003); also see Relli Schechter, ed. *Transition in Domestic Consumption and Family Life in the Modern Middle East* (New York: Palgrave McMillan, 2003) for further discussion of the centrality of consumption in nationalist discourses.

[468] "The Zainabiya Today." *Safar Al-Shaam*. (Damascus: Maktab Tabra'at Al- Zaynabi, 2004), 2. The *durhe-Najaf* is the term used for moonstone, considered to be the favored stone of the Imam 'Ali. Rings, necklaces, and earrings with the moonstone are often bought by Shiite Muslims for protection.

the Zaynabiyya Trust mentioned the "*barakat* of keeping reminders of our Lady's shrine in your home, so that your heart is filled with longing to return. A picture or a *taziyeh* (miniature replica) reminds us that we are the lovers of the *Ahl al-Bayt*, the chosen few amongst Muhammad's progeny."[469] These discussions show an awareness of both the religious and commercial value of souvenirs, promoted as a form of garnering revenue for the upkeep of the shrine, but also the critically important ways in which the purchaser interprets images, jewelry, and trinkets. It is significant that the word 'blessings' is used in reference to buying souvenirs or taking pictures. From this standpoint, these items are not ancillary to the traditional rituals of *ziyārat*, such as reading the Qurān or saying one's prayers at the shrine. Rather, these purchases are encouraged as actions that qualify the pilgrim for addition blessings because of their ability to perpetuate the experience of the pilgrimage. Thus *ziyārat* is no longer a bounded activity performed at the shrine itself. It extends into the realm of memory and representation, where wearing a ring of a specific stone or viewing a small replica of Zaynab's shrine will extend the religious and emotional experience of the pilgrimage.

The belief that these tokens could contract space and time underlies many of the purchases at the Sayyeda Zaynab bazaar. Mehjubeen Naqvi, a Shi'a from Pakistan, recalled her first *ziyārat* to the Sayyeda Zaynab in 1989.[470] Though Mehjubeen came from a devoutly Shi'a upper middle class family from Karachi and had for years longed to pay a visit to Zaynab's grave, something had always interfered with her desire to make

[469] *ibid*, *Safar Al-Shaam,* 3.
[470] Field notes, conversation with Mehjubeen Naqvi, March 11, 2012, Damascus. Mehjubeen was on her third trip to the Sayyeda Zaynab, though she acknowledged in our conversation that this might be the last for a long time because of the declining political situation. Her group had stopped in Mashhad and was cutting the itinerary to Damascus short by three days to return to Dubai.

the trip. At the time, a *ziyārat* trip from Pakistan was still a significant undertaking, and groups typically set aside up to a month for the long journey, seeking to maximize the value of the trip. When she was finally able to make the trip with her husband, Mehjubeen's group spent approximately three weeks in Damascus, staying in mediocre apartment lodgings on the outskirts of Sitt Zaynab. They had visited the shrine daily, men and women separating to say their prayers, recite *majlis* in Urdu, and beseech Zaynab for blessings. There were days the pilgrims spent hours at the shrine, with transportation back and forth to their lodgings somewhat limited. In that time women read Qurān and prayed, often overcome with the emotion of being so close to Zaynab, but much of the time they spent just being in the shrine, Mehjubeen admitted, chatting amongst themselves, sharing snacks, catching a short nap, and then returning to their prayer beads. What she was able to describe in most detail about the trip, however, were the two items she bought in the bazaar outside the shrine. The first was a silver replica of a cradle, known in Urdu as a *jhoola*, which was a symbol of the martyrdom of Husayn's six month old son 'Ali Asghar and the empty cradle left to his mother, Umm Rabab.[471] Mehjubeen brought the *jhoola* home to install in her private *imambargah*, a small room full of shrine replicas, prayer hangings, and Kabala paraphernalia that she had devoted to *majlis* and

[471] The two most recognizable symbols in Karbala mourning rituals were the *alam* (Arabic for flag) and the cradle. The *alam* in devotional rituals could either be a green, black, or red flag, to symbolize the flag of the Prophet's Bani Hashim family, given to 'Ali and then to Abbas ibn 'Ali. In the subcontinent, an *alam* was usually a long wooden pole mounted with a silver or metal 'panja,' in the shape of a hand that symbolized the five original members of the *Ahl al-Bayt* – Muhammad, 'Ali, Fatima, Hassan, and Husayn. If the *alam* was the symbol of battle, the masculine side of Karbala, the cradle represented the loss the women endured and the sacrifices they gave of their own body. Ali Asghar was kept thirsty along with the rest of Husayn's companions, and in her thirst Rabab was unable to provide milk. Husayn beseeched his enemies to take mercy on the baby, but Ali Asghar was shot through the neck instead, becoming the youngest martyr of Karbala.

the remembrance of Shi'a martyrs. The *jhoola* became the centerpiece of her personal shrine, and during Muharram, all the ladies who attended *majlis* in her house sought to touch it and ask for their requests. "The *jhoola* that comes from the shrine of Zaynab carries great *barakat,"* she explained. "We give our condolences to Umm Rabab and Umm al-Masā'ib [Zaynab] when we weep over it, and we feel pain as if we were present with them and could give our own children as sacrifice to our Imam." In turn, that pain and narrowing of distance is what caused Zaynab and Rabab to intercede on their behalf. The cradle symbolized what Susan Stewart would call the longing of the souvenir. "We do not need or desire souvenirs of events that are repeatable. Rather we need and desire souvenirs of events that are reportable, events whose materiality has escaped us, events that thereby exist only through the invention of narrative," Stewart has argued.[472] The *jhoola*, like other items bought in the bazaar, constructed a narrative of both *ziyārat* and of Marziya's elationship to Karbala.

The second item she bought was a pair of earrings for her daughter. The earrings were meant to impart on her daughter Zaynab's protection, carrying with them the potency of the shrine. "She wore the earrings every day," Muhjebeen stated. Unable to bring her daughter to the Sayyeda Zaynab, she gifted her a token designed to bestow some blessing from the shrine. Interesting, Mehjubeen noted that the earrings still remind her of Sukayna, Husayn's young daughter, whose earrings were ripped from her lobes during captivity. The meaning Mehjubeen placed on the jewelry as symbolizing some part of the Karbala narrative was a common behavior, echoed by pilgrims purchasing

[472] Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1992), 135.

items in the bazaar. Indeed, gifting itself is a social act, one that imbued the object with a complex interplay of meanings and purposes.[473] During this and her subsequent *ziyārat* trip she brought home an assortment of prayer beads and *musallahs* (mats) to give as gifts to family and friends, those who would appreciate tokens specifically from Zaynab's blessed shrine. For Mehjubeen, like the pilgrims who prayed at the shrine and crowded the bazaar, the purchase of items in the bazaar was an assertion of meaning and identity. As Arjun Appadurai has theorized, "consumption is eminently social, relational, and active, rather than private, atomic, or passive."[474] Buying souvenirs and gifts at the shrine allowed Shi'as to create transnational links through objects; a poster or wall hanging purchased in Damascus and displayed in Karachi allowed for individual meanings but also marked the user as part of a shared experience that transcended local contexts. In a period where visual symbols and narrative tropes of Shi'ism were used as powerful galvanizing tools, the purchase and exchange of such items from the Sayyeda Zaynab shrine was in part an act of asserting one's Shi'a identity. Surrounded by posters of Khomeini, 'Ali, and Husayn, the stalls in the bazaar were flooded with items that allowed pilgrims to continue and share the experience of *ziyārat* to a sacred Shi'a space.

Yet the emergence of the Sayyeda Zaynab as a sectarian space would also create new differentiations in status and competing ways of 'being Shi'a.' With the shrine established as a sacred Shi'a site, pilgrims and residents alike constructed their own

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[473] The French sociologist Marcel Mauss was the first to form a theory of exchange and meaning around the idea of the gift and its social structure. First published as an essy in 1925 (and in English in 1954), Mauss' theory was a seminal moment for anthropological theory. See Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies* (London: Routledge, 1990).

[474] Arjun Appadurai, "Introduction," in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective,* ed. Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988). 31.

understanding of what that behavior entailed. Fariba Adelkhah has focused on how religious tourism has resulted in the diversification and individualization of religious activity inside and outside the shrine.[475] Edith Szanto and Sabrina Mervin have taken a similar approach to the residents of the Sayyeda Zaynab region, examining the competition for influence between the various *hawzas* and demographic groups and the Syrian state's acceptance of these public religious displays.[476] Yet visiting *za'ireen* also distinguish themselves in their behavior, even in acts that affirm their participation in a community of believers. Marziya is a Syrian Twelver Shi'a who has lived in Sitt Zaynab for over 25 years. Her Iraqi husband had moved to the area in the 1980s and enrolled as a student at the *hawza* Zaynabiyya; her father, who had taught at the *hawza*, had arranged their marriage. Marziya organizes weekly *majlis* lectures at the *hawza* Zaynabiyya during the months of Muharram and Safar, teaches classes during 'off-season,' as she terms it, and has seen firsthand the evolution of pilgrimage to the shrine. The Pakistanis and Indians come in large groups and are the most demonstrative, she noted. The women gather to chant lamentations, weep loudly, and beat their chests, both inside the haram and in the courtyard. They usually wore traditional *shalwar kameez* in a range of colors, she described, marking them in visual contrast to the Iranians and Iraqi pilgrims dressed

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[475] Fariba Adelkhah, "Moral Economy of Pilgrimage and Civil Society in Iran: Religious, Commercial and Tourist Trips to Damascus," in *South African Historical Journal* 61(1), 2009, 31-53. Her focus is primarily in the way that individuals from recent *ziyārat* groups from Iran challenged and subverted the state's ideology.

[476] Szanto analyzed debates between various *hawzas* and their chosen *marja'* over the legitimacy of *tatbir*, a mourning ritual involving striking one's head with a sword or knife to draw blood. See Edith Szanto, "Following Sayyeda Zaynab." Sabrina Mervin focuses on the differences between public rituals at the Sayyeda Zaynab and among the Shi'a of Hayy al-Amīn, acknowledging, "The Syrian state allows these Shiite foreigners to demonstrate their religious particularities." See Sabrina Mervin: "Ashura: Some Remarks on Ritual Practices in Different Shiite Communities (Lebanon and Syria)," in *The Other Shiites: From the Mediterranean to Central Asia*. eds. Silvia Naef, Ulrich Rudolph, Gregor Schoeler (Bern: Peter Lang, 2007).

primarily in black *chador*. Most noticeably, according to Marziya, "They buy everything. They bring home hundreds of *tasbeehs* (prayer beads), even the plastic ones. [They buy] jewelry, pictures, perfume, bags full."[477] Her sister Fatima adds in English, "the shopkeepers know they want to buy everything if you say [it] is from a *mazār*. 'This ring is from Najaf al-Ashraf,' they buy. You say, 'this *chador* was put inside the *dharih* [of Zaynab],' and the women will buy it."

Marziya and Fatima passed no explicit judgment on the rush to purchase commodities from the bazaar, despite insinuating a certain degree of credulity. Yet as locals to the Sayyeda Zaynab, they observed and generalized group behavior. In contrast to the Pakistanis, the *za'ireen* from the Gulf States rarely engaged in the same public displays of religiosity. They were wealthier, Marziya explained, and usually stayed in their preferred hotels at higher rates. Most notably, however, "the Saudis only buy gold. For them, everything is *'bi'dah*," she explained. *Bi'dah,* or innovation outside of the Qurān and proscribed *Sunnah* of Muhammad, is a source of much debate in Islamic jurisprudence. More conservative Sunni interpretations, including those espoused by Wahhabi doctrine in Saudi Arabia, stated that there were no true good forms of *bi'dah*; Shi'a theology has tended to be more permissive of *bi'dah*, provided it did not contradict the Qurān or *hadith*. Interestingly, Marziya implied that Gulf Shi'as, especially those from Saudi Arabia, were willing to undertake *ziyārat* and spend considerable amounts on accommodations but had adapted the Wahhabi view on the purchase of goods from the bazaar. They were less inclined to purchase key chains, jewelry, miniatures of the shrine,

[477] Field notes, conversation with Marziya at Sayyeda Zaynab, March 5, 2012, Damascus. Marziya and her younger sister Fatima would invite us to a *majlis* held at the Shirazi *hawza* where she was giving the main lecture. The *majlis* could normally have hundreds of participants, she noted, but with the war the numbers had dwindled.

and other paraphernalia, according to Marziya, because they lived in a milieu where such practice could be labeled as *bi'dah*. That ideology had seeped into their own understandings of acceptable practice. While they might purchase certain valuables from the shrine, their social environment curtailed the practice of sharing gifts or visual representations of *ziyārat* to the Sayyeda Zaynab.

Bibi Pak Daman in the Nizām-e-Mustafa

The distinctions over the appropriate range of behavior at shrines, including the permissibility of purchasing religious trinkets as *barakat*, were echoed at Bibi Pak Daman and in its bazaar, unsettled spaces in a country coming to terms with its own identity. Like at the Sayyeda Zaynab, a more assertive brand of Shi'ism shaped the debates over the space and the behavior of its pilgrims. Yet the scrutiny over practices remained strong, especially as performed by female devotees to the shrine. If Syrian Shi'as sought to frame the site as a national landmark or certain pilgrims to the Sayyeda Zaynab self-regulated for fears of accusations of *bid'ah*, the ambiguities of Ruqayyah's shrine illustrate the growing intensity of sectarian pressures against Shi'a rituals.

By the end of the 1970s, there were significant pressures in Pakistan calling for a greater emphasis on Islam and demonstrations of faith in public life. The loss of Bangladesh in 1971 and the declaration of the Ahmadis as non-Muslims in 1974 were two landmark events in Pakistan's engagement with Islam as the defining feature of the state, setting the precedent for greater demands for a religious system of governance. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, an essentially secular politician at the head of a left-leaning party, introduced an increasing number of "Shariat" regulations designed to regulate public

behavior – a nod to the pressure that Islamic organizations were exerting on the political process. Bhutto faced intense competition from a coalition of conservative Islamic parties in the elections of March 1977; though the PPP won a strong reelection mandate, the party's manifesto had been repositioned on Islamic grounds. In April 1977, Bhutto announced a set of laws banning gambling, horse racing, and the consumption of alcohol, and Friday replaced Sunday as an official holiday.[478] Despite the widespread understanding that Bhutto himself did not abide by these restrictions in his private life, the purpose of these measures was ostensibly about "reiterating his determination to introduce complete Islamic order in Pakistan…designed to make Pakistan a true Islamic State."[479]

Though the rise of Zia ul-Haq in 1977 changed the political culture of the state, the trend towards a state-mandated religious culture had thus been on the rise before the imposition of martial law. Islamization, however, crystallized these efforts, with Zia ul-Haq attempting to frame a sanctioned, normative Islam in Pakistan. In addition to legal ordinances and constitutional amendments, new laws in the areas of education and culture included the replacement of English with Urdu as the national medium of instruction, compulsory teaching of religious subjects (*Islamiyya*) in all levels of education, increased emphasis on Arabic in education, and mass distribution of new textbooks, many funded by Saudi Arabia.[480] In a speech delivered on the death anniversary of Muhammad Ali Jinnah, Zia ul-Haq stated that these measures were meant "to establish an Islamic social order in Pakistan [and] are the true manifestation of Jinnah

[478] "New Measures Introduced," *Pakistan Times,* April 18, 1977.
[479] *The Sun* editorial, April 18, 1977, 1.
[480] Muhammad Qasim Zaman, "Sectarianism in Pakistan: The Radicalization of Shi'i and Sunni Identities," in *Modern Asian Studies,* Vol. 32, No. 3 (Jul., 1998), 699-716.

dreams."[481] While martial law hindered legal and political challenges to the new laws, the mass mobilization of Shi'as in the wake of Zia ul-Haq's *zakat* provisions created a new sectarian dynamic. The concurrent rise of Iran as an Islamic state and the influx of funding from Gulf States for *madrasas* and Sunni ideological agendas framed an increasingly violent showdown over what an 'authentic' Islamic state could allow. At Bibi Pak Daman, geopolitical events, growing anger over Islamic orthodoxy, and discomfort over the expanding nature of Shi'a devotionalism made the shrine a microcosm for debates.

The rise of sectarian violence in the early 1980s often emerged around sites of worship. Clashes in Karachi in 1982 began a cycle of retaliation, erupting in riots in October of 1984 that resulted in five dead and more than 200 wounded, and more died in Shi'a-Sunni violence in other major cities.[482] Yet conflict over the administration and use of sacred space was not limited to inter-sect divides. In 1984, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi had ordered the Indian Army to take control of the Golden Temple, the holiest shrine in the Sikh religion, and root out Harchand Singh Longowal, the leader of a Sikh separatist movement who had barricaded himself within the shrine. The resulting standoff resulted in the mass deaths of hundreds of civilians, many who had chosen the temple as a space to assert their distinct identity.[483] The violence over religious public spaces was mirrored in Pakistan. Anger over the Auqaf's management of shrines and the allowance

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[481] *Dawn* newspaper, September 11, 1980.
[482] William Richter, "Pakistan in 1984: Digging In," in *Asian Survey*, Vol. 25, No. 2, A Survey of Asia in 1984: Part II (Feb., 1985), 151.
[483] See "Indian Army Units Surround Holy Sikh Shrine in Punjab," *The Washington Post,* Jun. 4, 1984; Cynthia Mahmood, "Blue Star," in *Fighting for Faith and Nation: Dialogues with Sikh Militants* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011). Gandhi was assassinated by two of her Sikh bodyguards, four months after Operation Blue Star.

of Sufi music led to a major confrontation at Lahore's Badshahi mosque between conservative, Wahhabi-influenced Deobandi followers and Barelvi disciplines, who incorporated Sufi veneration of saints and tombs in their practices.[484] A tense environment reigned at major shrines, with the threat of violence hanging over disputes about religious doctrine and practice.

A Shrine Under Attack

The spreading conflicts between the state's putative imposition of Islam and the traditions of Sufism and Shi'ism quickly reached Bibi Pak Daman, leading the government to limit access to the shrine and take over more land. The Auqaf Manager noted that for years, Sunni and Shi'a pilgrims had quarreled over a plot of graveyard land, but in 1985, a physical confrontation broke out when Deobandi students from a nearby *madrasa* had defaced an ornate Shi'a gravestone and removed the *alam* installed on it. According to the Deputy Commissioner, the students had threatened further attempts on the graveyard "as the ornamentation of graves was *bid'ah*. Both the parties desired to utilize this place to promote their religious interests, which is likely to give rise to sectarian differences. Keeping in view the tension prevailing in the area and the sectarian nature of the dispute, it is requested that this piece of land be acquired and closed by the Auqaf Department, in public interest."[485] In response to the aggression by *madrasa* students, the Auqaf Department fenced in the property with armed guards,

[484] *Al-Munshir* vol. 26, no. 3 (1984)
[485] Letter from Shahid Rafi, Deputy Commissioner to Commissioner, Lahore regarding taking over of Khasra No.4740, April 5, 1989. General Records of Darbar Hazrat Bibi Pak Daman, Lahore.

limiting access to certain hours of the week. Vociferous protests from Shi'a visitors that they should be allowed to access the graveyard and perform prayer and ritual were met with refusal, based on the need for public order. The protestors had ultimately achieved their aims – the state intervened to limit Shi'a public religiosity, deemed as threatening to the system in the current situation.

How rituals change and adapt when access is restricted through the display of government policing, however, should also be noted. The heightened presence of security became a common sight for pilgrims, both at Bibi Pak Daman and around Pakistan, but the presence of metal detectors, fences, and checkpoints undoubtedly altered the flow of movement between the surrounding bazaar and the shrine. In turn, shopkeepers and residents of the area alike complained that while the government was sometimes employed as a mediator between Sunni and Shiite representatives, the vast majority of the population viewed the government's intentions and policies with some suspicion. Shopkeepers claimed that government security had affected business by limiting free movement of pilgrims who would otherwise buy devotional offerings to leave at the shrine.[486] The proprietor of a small shop on the northern end of the confiscated lot wrote the Auqaf Department in response, questioning by what right the government had

[486] This would be a frequent and ongoing source of conflict between shrine authorities and merchants, as Bibi Pak Daman was a constant target. In 2010, a shopkeeper brought a case to the Lahore High Court to demand recompense from the Auqaf Department, which had shut down many stalls due to terrorist threats: "till today no unpleasant incident of terrorism ever took place in the history of this respected shrine...the petitioner in his old age is being deprived from his legal right of profession." Haji Muhammad Yaqoob vs. Chief Administrator Auqaf, etc, Writ Petition 199/2011, Jan. 29, 2011, General Records of Darbar Hazrat Bibi Pak Daman, Lahore.

prevented access to this plot and demanding "full returns on rent dating from February to this unlawful seizure."[487]

Yet while there existed recriminations against the government's role in religious life, equal criticism was leveled on the pilgrims to Bibi Pak Daman and their practices. For critics, the stories that described Bibi Ruqayyah's life read more like myths than factual history; unlike the majority of shrines in Pakistan, its ambiguity was hugely problematic for detractors, as it was one of the few shrines for which historical record or proof of lineage and descent of the caretakers was sparse. This uncertainty, then, opened the shrine and its pilgrims to attack: if there could be no satisfactory proof given for the story of Bibi Pak Daman and Bibi Ruqayyah's existence, then devotees were simply engaged in un-Islamic rituals and superstitions – a charge that carries extra weight in Pakistan, where sensitivity to long-standing Hindu influences in local religious practices abounds.[488] The defacing of graves by religious students was one such articulation. Shi'a pilgrims also complained to shrine officials that Sunni "agitators" had passed out papers questioning the authenticity of Ruqayyah's grave at the shrine and printing an inflammatory quote from the Qurān. "The Auqaf Department must intervene to stop this act of provocation and the unjust invocation of the noble Qurān, to which all Muslims lay faith," urged the letter.[489] The outright rejection of Ruqayyah's grave and the shrine itself

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[487] Letter from Azhar Ali to Secretary Auqaf, Lahore, Memo No. ACW-ML-34/2, Oct. 21, 1985, General Records of Darbar Hazrat Bibi Pak Daman, Lahore.
[488] See Akbar S. Ahmed, *Resistance and Control in Pakistan* (London: Routledge, 1983) and Katherine Ewing, ed, *Shari'at and Ambiguity in South Asian Islam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).
[489] Letter from Chairman, Anjuman-e-Nisaran-e-Ruqayyah Kubra bint 'Ali to Chief Administrator, Auqaf, Lahore, Memo No. ACW-3-14-LM, Oct. 15, 1985. General Records of Darbar Hazrat Bibi Pak Daman, Lahore. The quoted Qurān verse read: "Surely whoever

had a clear logical endpoint in the context of national discourse - those that flocked to the shrine to give offerings, pray at the graves, and seek miracles from these saintly women could be committing *shirk,* or the veneration of inanimate things as objects of worship.[490] Indeed, the charge that pilgrims to Sufi shrines were engaged in un-Islamic behavior was a common one in the 1980s, but that Ruqayyah's narrative was distinctly Shi'a made Bibi Pak Daman a more prominent target for those critiques. Belief that saints had the ability of intercession and in the infallibility of the twelve Imams had long been a challenge to Shi'a theology, as more conservative Sunni doctrines believe the Qurān prohibited praying to anyone but Allah and the Prophet. But *ziyārat* to an entirely false shrine would thus be superstition at best, and at worse, falling wholly outside the bounds of Islam.

These very concerns about misleading superstition were echoes of those voiced decades earlier in Javid Iqbal's tracts, concerns that first prompted the creation of the Auqaf Department. The Auqaf ordinances issued through the 1960s and 70s were in part an attempt to normalize these practices and bring rhetoric about shrines and mystics in line with 'conventional' Islamic beliefs, endorsed by the state. While Zia ul-Haq's power was never enough to uproot the deep ties that devotees had to saints or shrines, the accepted context for understanding these sites changed. The correct justification for the visitation of shrines, according to official and orthodox positions, was because they were

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associates [others] with Allah, then Allah has forbidden to him the garden, and his abode is the fire; and there shall be no helpers for the unjust." (Surah al'Mā'ida).

[490] *Shirk* was considered a refutation of the first principle of Islam: *tawhīd,* or the oneness of God. Thus, a practice associated with *shirk* was fundamentally un-Islamic and was an accusation frequently leveled by Wahhabi and Deobandi Sunni followers at Shi'a and Sufi veneration of saints and shrines. The concept of *shirk* was often applied in general to reject figural representations and imagery in Islam, yet the lived realities were often much different. For more see, G.R. Hawting, *The Idea of Idolatry* and Finbarr Barry Flood, "Between Cult and Culture: Bamiyan, Islamic Iconoclasm and the Museum," in *Art Bulletin*, 84.4, 2002.

primarily sanctified places of prayer. When the identity of the saints could be 'verified,' proponents could argue that they were praying to personalities that were known in their own time for their miracles and piety, as Auqaf Department materials explained during Zia ul-Haq's time. At Bibi Pak Daman, however, even devotees believed that the graves were representative, not real, and its history was far more uncertain.

The concept of pilgrimage to Bibi Pak Daman represented only part of the critique, however, as the rituals that pilgrims engaged in at the shrine were equally open to censure; on the surface, many appeared to mirror those enacted at Hindu temples. Devotees brought offerings to Bibi Pak Daman in the hopes that these items would facilitate a return of blessings, spreading flower petals over the graves to show their respect. A commonly observed ritual at the shrine was the distribution of traditional sweets with rings embedded in them. Pilgrims who wanted to make a request of Bibi Ruqayyah would pick a sweet and wear the ring until the wish was granted. When the wish was fulfilled, the pilgrim gave a return to Bibi Ruqayyah and her shrine, leaving more sweets with rings as thanks and allowing future pilgrims to continue the wish cycle. This cyclical relationship embodies what Pnina Werbner has dubbed "sacred exchange," and what anthropologists John Eade and Michael Sallnow have termed the "self-interested exchange between human beings and the divine."[491] This exchange allowed pilgrims to commoditize blessings and gratitude, with rings and sweets symbolizing divine intervention. Another manner of requesting intercession was for devotees to tie red string on the marble lattice that shields the central grave or deposit a lock to symbolize a

[491] See Pnina Werbner and Helen Basu, eds, *Embodying Charisma: Modernity, Locality, and the Performance of Emotion in Sufi Cults* (London: Routledge, 1999) and John Eade and Michael Sallnow, *Contesting the Sacred: The Anthropology of Pilgrimage* (London: Routledge, 1991), 24.

mannat – a vow made to a saint for future offerings in exchange for the granting of a wish. When these wishes were granted, the pilgrim returned to the shrine to remove the threads and locks and deposit sweets, flowers, or donations to the shrines' upkeep. Pilgrims burned incense and candles as they beseeched Ruqayyah for intercession, and the oil and ash residue were buried due to their sacred essence, rather than discarded.

(5.7: *Mannat* locks at Bibi Pak Daman)

Locks, thread, flowers, sweets, jewelry, incense and all the other items needed for these rituals and prayers were sold in the surrounding bazaar, blurring the line between religion and consumption and raising questions about causality – whether the presence of these commodities created ritual or the existence of these rituals created the demand for

commercial goods. Yet the ubiquity of these items and the associated rituals were not without censure. In an article published by a local magazine and obtained by the Auqaf Department for its files, the writer lambasted the *Ahl al-Shi'a* for "the practice of *Hinduanna* rituals [which] are condemned. *Mithai* (sweets) and garlands are *poojah* worship."[492] Equating rituals at Bibi Pak Daman with *poojah,* the practice of worshipping Hindu deities, was a powerful critique, again invoking the idea of *shirk* and un-Islamic behavior. For a nation born out of the notion that Muslims could not co-exist amongst a Hindu majority, the charge that pilgrims at Bibi Pak Daman were replicating Hindu customs was both a charge against Islamic orthodoxy and the idea of Pakistan. The presence of the article in the Auqaf records indicates that shrine authorities were constantly aware of the condemnation leveled against the shrine, including the effect that these critiques could have for the delicate balance on the ground. Nor was the criticism limited to tokens like sweets and flowers. The Auqaf Manager was strongly advised to limit the *mehndi* rituals at the shrine, as they were causing discord.[493] The use of *mehndi*, or henna, was common in marriage rituals in the subcontinent and was a symbol to invoke the martyrdom of Qasim ibn Hassan, Husayn's young nephew. Some Shi'a traditions note that Husayn had made a promise that his daughter would marry his brother Hassan's son; knowing that death was coming in Karbala, Qasim was wed before *Ashura*. This particular narrative remains a source of some disagreement within Shi'a historiography, with many recent scholars questioning the presence of marriage rituals in such a somber night. The use of *mehndi* nevertheless became a highly ritualized,

[492] Babar Rahman, *Al-Minār,* 29 Muharram 1407 (Oct. 1986), accessed at General Records of Darbar Hazrat Bibi Pak Daman, Lahore.
[493] Letter from Chief Administrator of Auqaf, West Pakistan to Administrator of Auqaf, Central Zone, Lahore. Nov. 25, 1987. General Records of Darbar Hazrat Bibi Pak Daman, Lahore.

syncretic means of marking the events at Karbala and requesting the intercession of Shi'a infallibles in marriage matters, a ritual that clearly earned censure at Bibi Pak Daman.

While many of these practices occurred at shrines around the country, certain rituals had added meaning at Bibi Pak Daman, such as *mehndi*. Others were more exclusively associated with Bibi Pak Daman. During the month of Muharram, a pure white horse was paraded through the narrow lanes of the bazaar, representing *Zuljanah*, the horse of Imam Husayn who carried him in Karbala and then disappeared in grief over the death of his master. At Bibi Pak Daman, people stood on both sides of the bazaar and paid respect to the *Zuljanah*, many showering the horse with flowers and other offerings as a sign of honor.[494] The Auqaf Department often suspended the *Zuljanah* procession in periods of heightened tensions, incurring the anger of Muhammad Bakhsh Shah Qureshi and other Shi'a members of the community.[495] Despite the defense that the *Zuljanah* was merely a representation of Husayn's suffering at Karbala, the reverence shown to a mere animal was viewed as symbolic of the un-Islamic nature of Sufi and Shiite belief, while the practices of pilgrims at the shrine were condemned as deriving from neighboring Hindu rituals.

In addition to the scrutiny over devotional acts and rituals, Bibi Pak Daman in particular was associated with female religious practice and concerns, which have often been labeled by scholars and devotees alike as distinct and more 'folk' than the male-dominated Islamic orthodoxy. Discussions of women's religious practice have long

[494] David Pinault has extensively studied Shi'a devotional rituals in the subcontinent and the way that transnational symbols and narratives are adapted and challenged within the community. See David Pinault, *Horse of Karbala: Muslim Devotional Life in India* (New York: Palgrave McMillan, 2001) and *The Shiites: Ritual and Popular Piety in a Muslim Community* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992).
[495] See chapter 4

pointed to its fluidity and adaptability, but also the way women have often been forced to deviate from proscribed, text-based practices by the rejection of their presence in state-sanctioned rituals;[496] this view of women's religious devotion was particularly pronounced at Bibi Pak Daman. In fact, it was often regarded as a shrine that catered toward female concerns, and for many years the presence of men within the shrine courtyard was a source of great controversy. So feminized had the shrine become that local hagiographies claimed that the trees present within the courtyard of the shrine had once possessed great *barakat* and *shif'a* (healing) in the leaves, but as men began visiting the shrine, the trees lost much of their miraculous abilities. According to local traditions, the most common practice at Bibi Pak Daman related to wishes about children and conception.[497] In addition, while 'folk' religious practice was most commonly linked to class divisions, rooted in Iqbal's view that poorer and more rural populations were more susceptible to religious syncretism and needed the education of the Auqaf Department, a large cross-section of classes was represented amongst women pilgrims at Bibi Pak Daman.[498] The charge that women were more susceptible to superstition was a common

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[496] Mary Elaine Hegland in particular has done much work on Shi'a female devotional practice in Pakistan and women's growing participation in rituals as a result of a new religious transnationalism. She argues, "Shi'a Muslim women in Peshawar, Pakistan have increasingly faced restrictive ritual constructions of femininity and fundamentalist ideology… Rather than denying or contradicting symbolic and verbal deprecations of femininity outright, they have devoted themselves to the commemorative rites for the Shi'a martyr, Imam Husein. They have used these rituals to develop their own self-confidence, performance abilities, entertainment, fame, and social support, disclosing through the performative aspects of their ritual activity, their agency, and transformative achievements." See Mary Elaine Hegland, "Flagellation and Fundamentalism: (Trans)Forming Meaning, Identity, and Gender Through Pakistani Women's Rituals of Mourning," in *American Ethnologist*, Vol. 25, No. 2 (May, 1998), 240.

[497] Khaki, *Bibian Pak Daman,* 32-33.

[498] Zehra Niaz and the Bibi Pak Daman Trust represent an upper class of women engaged with the shrine. According to a bazaar merchant recently quoted in a local news article, "Mostly women believe in the ladoo [traditional sweet] myth. Many educated women from posh areas like the Defence Housing Authority, Gulberg, and Cantt visit the shrine with a hope that their wishes will

one, but it certainly gained more traction in the context of Bibi Pak Daman, where women and their spirituality were the focal point of both the narrative associated with the shrine and the practices that occurred within it. Indeed, the gender dynamics at Bibi Pak Daman were unique amongst the most popular Sufi sites in Pakistan, where shrines to female saints are extremely rare and the division of space and gender conventions at many large shrines result in a substantially larger male presence.

Yet despite its perception as a feminine shrine – both in identity and the concerns it represented – it was nevertheless inserted into a male-dominated government bureaucracy, coming under attack from those whose vision of legitimate Islamic practice conformed to strict patriarchal control and limiting the influence of feminine and local traditions. Indeed, an increasing number of complaints were lodged with Auqaf officials against women pilgrims at the shrine, who were insistent on their mourning rituals but prone to become overemotional. A court injunction was taken out against Parveen and Nawab Bibi in 1985, ordering that they "shall not deliver any speech or raise any slogan for a period of TWO MONTHS," the duration of the months of Muharram and Safar. The order noted that the two women "delivered objectionable speeches in the past…and uttered words which tended to create sectarian hatred. They have not been persuaded by reason." In light of the tensions prevailing in Lahore and around the country, the law had to step forward to put a halt to the brewing conflict.[499] Yet these women were not content to accept the state's restrictions. In an affidavit responding to the court's ruling, the two

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come true." Ali Usman,"Bibi Pak Daman – A place of solace for everyone." *The Daily Times*, January 15, 2008.

[499] Memo from District Magistrate, Lahore, to Madam Parveen Dukhtar [daughter] Nawab Bibi, No. RDM/DPO, Sept. 23, 1985, General Records of Darbar Hazrat Bibi Pak Daman, Lahore.

women argued that they "must be allowed to gather at *Darbar Bibian Sahiba* and express their unity with Bibi Zaynab on the holy day of Safar. This [ruling] severely prejudices [their] religious freedom and harms the expression of faith."[500] The insistence that these women be allowed to hold *majlis* on the 24th of Safar, Zaynab's death anniversary, was critical for understanding how Bibi Pak Daman functioned for these women. The *majlis* was medium for assertiveness, both of their identities as Shi'a and the particular bond they more generally felt for the women of Karbala. In the face of a male authority structure seeking to empty the shrine of emotional consequence, women like Parveen and Nawab Bibi challenged the boundaries of state controlled religiosity.

A Shrine in Sacred Geography

To a large degree, it was the unsettled nature of Bibi Pak Daman and the arguments over its function that allowed these conflicts to take on a more charged valence. Even as anthropologists and historians of religion have analyzed the complex meanings ascribed to pilgrimage, the notion of the shrine occupying a central space in the lived and imagined identities of devotees remained a salient one. For many faiths, however, and most certainly Shi'ism, multiple centers of this sort existed, places that possessed an emotional valence for believers and, linked together, construct a map of sacred geography. These linkages were prominently illustrated in the narratives, use of space, and bazaar surrounding Bibi Pak Daman. Both ritual practice and the commodities and souvenirs sold at the shrine emphasized a duality that existed as a result of this notion

[500] Letter to Shahzad Hassan Pervez, District Magistrate, Lahore from Nawab Bibi bint Muhammad Qizilbash, Nov. 1st, 1985, General Records of Darbar Hazrat Bibi Pak Daman, Lahore.

of expansive and interconnected sacred space, where both the specific place and the places alluded to coexist. Ruqayyah's story was incomplete without reference to the great names of Shi'ism, such as 'Ali, Husayn, Zaynab, and her husband, Muslim bin Aqīl. Indeed, it is her very association with these figures that made her story relevant and her shrine a place of special stature. She was, of course, revered for her singular role in spreading Islam in the subcontinent, but it is the references to these other better-known narratives that frame the contours of her story. Beginning with 'Ali's will, her story wound through her husband and sons' martyrdom in Kufa, Husayn's sacrifice in Karbala, and Zaynab's sorrows and trials in Damascus. Her shrine, then, functioned simultaneously as a place for devotees to gather to seek her intercession and as a local conduit to a wider religious space. Medina, Najaf, Karbala, Damascus – all the holiest sites and most emotive images were brought together in this small and unassuming complex in the crowded alleys of Lahore. For women like Parveen and Nawab Bibi, Bibi Pak Daman was a place for them to access narratives of mourning for Zaynab and the other martyrs of Karbala.

These connections were made explicit in the surrounding bazaar to Bibi Pak Daman, a narrow street filled with numerous small stalls that overflowed with posters, books, prayer beads, cloth embroidered with prayers and invocations, jewelry, silver *alams*, and other paraphernalia. The items sold at the Bibi Pak Daman bazaar illustrate how ties to other Islamic figures and sacred sites was promoted, bringing them into closer proximity with Ruqayyah's shrine. While a small number of books were sold about the history of Bibi Pak Daman, the vast majority of literature in the bazaar was about the lives of the Prophet Muhammad, his daughter Fatima, Zaynab, or the twelve Shiite

Imams. Similarly, prayer compilations and almanacs were popular items, and the contents and instructions in these books are attributed to the Prophet and the Imams. Amongst stickers and posters with prayers, the most common are those imprinted with the prayer *Naad-e-'Ali*, a short prayer that was said to have been revealed to Prophet at the Battle of Khaybar, instructing those in difficulties to call on the intercession of 'Ali. While the Auqaf department owned some of the land of the bazaar, large portions had fallen out of public control through encroachment. As such, the Auqaf Department had limited ability to monitor all the goods sold. A resident of the Bibi Pak Daman region filed a complaint with the Auqaf Department that a shopkeeper had been loudly playing the lecture on *sajda* (acceptance of God's will) and the events after the night of Ashura, recited by Rasheed Turabi, a Shi'a scholar whose fiery lectures had been deeply popular before his death in 1973. The Auqaf Manager recommended his assistant speak to the shop owner, yet little could be done to enforce any decisions because the land was outside Auqaf control.[501] The bazaar land has largely been privately owned, according to the manager of the Auqaf Department at Bibi Pak Daman, despite attempts by the Auqaf and Bibi Pak Daman Trust to reclaim the original *waqf* allotment of land. Thus, the exchange of religious commodities conducted outside the shrine often existed outside the realm of explicit religious or government control.[502] Yet these shopkeepers capitalized on the

[501] Letter to Assistant Manager for Waqf Properties, Sector V, from Administrator Auqaf Central Zone. [*trans.*] 6th June 1988. General Records Darbar Hazrat Bibi Pak Daman, Lahore.
[502] Field notes, interview with Mian Muhammad Syed, Head of Auqaf Division, Bibi Pak Daman, January 3rd, 2011, Lahore. Currently, a collective board forms the de-facto governing structure of the shopkeepers, and the faces of these members are displayed prominently in the main bazaar area. Interestingly, this billboard also includes a picture of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, chairman of the Pakistan Muslim League (N) and a politician whose deep ties to Punjab remain the basis of his support. The picture of Sharif is merely one element in the mix of sectarian, regional, and national interests that surround Bibi Pak Daman.

sacred connections of Bibi Pak Daman, understanding the demand and encouraging the purchase of a range of goods that invoked Shi'as most revered personalities.

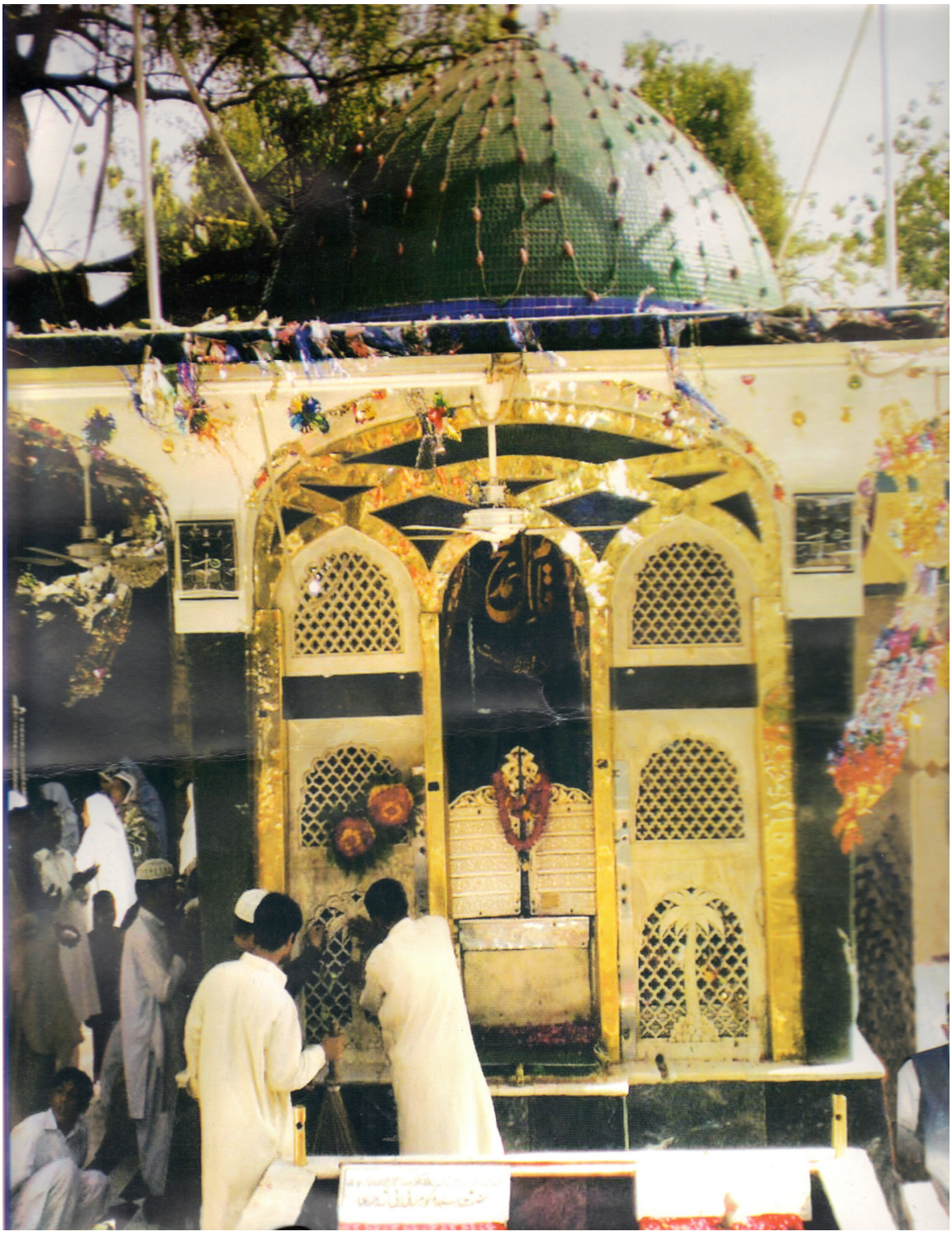
What is notable, then, is that the protests did not always relate to Ruqayyah, but to the concept of the shrine itself. Only some of what was sold the bazaar directly referenced Ruqayyah herself, because the variances in her narratives allowed interpretations that stretched beyond the specific contours of her life. The bazaar reinforced that Bibi Pak Daman's spiritual power drew in part from the sacred spaces that it could invoke. It was valued both for its specificity and its ambiguity, the latter of which was reflected in the few items sold in the bazaar that were specific to the shrine. In his book of Sufi devotional posters, scholar Jurgen Wasim Frembgen notes that the devotional posters gathered from Bibi Pak Daman were distinct. Unlike posters from a wide range of shrines for Sufi saints, the devotional images specific to Bibi Pak Daman merely depict the shrine itself,

> Following Islamic moral rules, there is of course no imagined figural representation of the female saints, but the depiction of the shrine is taken as a kind of synecdoche for them. Basically, the picture consists of a photograph showing the sanctuary, courtyard, and some devotees with additional sketched contours on the green flag and on the tomb in the foreground. The light blue sky is filled with inscriptions in Arabic, namely the formula *ya hayy, ya qayyum* ('Oh the alive, of the self-sustaining') and the invocation of the five members of the holy family (*ahl al-bait*). The view of the shrine is elaborately framed including a cartouche mentioning the name of the saint and of the artist.[503]

Another poster, obtained in the bazaar of Bibi Pak Daman, depicts a very similar image of the inner mausoleum, surrounded by devotees performing their *ziyārat* rituals.

[503] Jurgen Wasim Frembgen. *The Friends of God: Sufi Saints in Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 17.

Frembgen's point about the lack of figural representation specifically of female saints seems to hold true, as the portraits of Shiite personalities in the bazaars of the Sayyeda Zaynab and Bibi Pak Daman were solely of the male Imams. Because the veiling and purity of the women of Shi'ism was central to its own narrative and self-fashioning, any



(5.8: Bibi Pak Daman Poster)

images of these women are of fully covered figures, their identities ambiguous and obscured. The only image associated with Ruqayyah in the bazaar is in replicas of "The Night of Ashura," by famed Iranian miniature master Mahmud Farshchian, which depicts veiled women weeping over Husayn's rider-less horse in Karbala. This same picture is most commonly associated with Zaynab and used to illustrate narratives of her suffering.

(Figure 5.9: 'Evening of Ashura')

Indeed, despite the narratives about their lives that were developed through the 20th century and the political and spiritual investment in their shrines, as women the recorded histories of Ruqayyah and Zaynab were limited. Yet the anonymity of these women

allows these images to take on multiple valences. Indeed, reproductions of the "The Night of Ashura" were amongst the most popular images sold at the Sayyeda Zaynab bazaar, covering books on Karbala, calendars, and magazines on Shi'a subjects. In the use of this image to represent Ruqayyah, her personality and her suffering are generalized, her story linked to events that she may or may not have witnessed and to all the women who sacrificed and mourned for Husayn. The common images found at Bibi Pak Daman and the Sayyeda Zaynab tie the two women together in collective suffering, in both their general presence as witnesses to Karbala and the specific ways their shrines allow believers to access these narratives.

The malleability of images of these women was similarly echoed at the Sayyeda Zaynab. One of the most prominent images in the bazaar was one made famous during the Iranian Revolution and the war with Iraq, published as a commemorative poster on Zaynab's death anniversary by the Islamic Republic Party, or Hezb-e-Jumhuri-e Eslami. Chelkowski describes the poster:

> Two crowds of women appear in this poster. The first group is composed of women in white chadors (symbolically representing shrouds and readiness for martyrdom) who ride camels while holding in their arms the severed heads of their martyred male relatives. The camels are chained together to symbolize captivity. In the second group is a multitude of women wearing black chadors with clenched fists stretching away to the horizon. The women wearing white chadors represent the courageous captive women of Karbala….the black chadored [sic] women represent contemporary Iranian females supporting the war efforts against Iraqi aggression. A large silhouetted woman in a white chador looms out of the

> crowd of contemporary women and smashes the Ommayyad/Pahlavi crown with her fist.[504]

The image was clearly a product of its context, yet it shifts when brought into the Sayyeda Zaynab and Bibi Pak Daman bazaars. Its presence at the Sayyeda Zaynab and Bibi Pak Daman shrines ties these shrines – and these women – to an assertive interpretation of the role of women on Shi'a historiography. For the merchants that sell the poster and devotees that buy it, the image is given a context broader than the Iranian Revolution. Yet its ubiquity also underscores David Morgan's emphasis on the 'sacred gaze,' that the act of *seeing* and social and cultural constructions of belief are what create the image's meaning.[505]

Women and the Female Shrine

The general sacredness of Bibi Pak Daman was often used as a substitute for Ruqayyah's identity; as a consequence, while devotees certainly thronged to the shrine for spiritual benefits, details about the specific identities of the women buried there were much less emphasized. Nevertheless, the shrine remained a popular destination for women, many recalling their visits there as a rite of passage. Asma Rizvi, a middle-aged visitor from the Gulberg section of Lahore, noted that her mother had routinely brought her and her sister to Bibi Pak Daman throughout her childhood. Every few months, or "whenever she was most in need of our Bibi's intercession," her mother would arrive at the shrine with sweets and a green strip of cloth to tie around the grill of the gravesite to

[504] Chelkowski, "Iconography of the Women of Karbala," 127-129.
[505] David Morgan, *The Sacred Gaze: Religious Visual Culture in Theory and Practice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005)

bond her wish to Ruqayyah. Yet Asma had only heard Ruqayyah referred to as "Bibi" for years of these visits; "I only learned in truth who she was many years later, and even now I am not sure of those women buried here with her," she admitted.[506] She still recalled, however, in vivid detail the certainty that her mother and her circle of frequent visitors felt at the power of the shrine and its Bibi to deliver blessings, even attributing positive news that they had not specifically prayed for to the intercession of Bibi Pak Daman. They always made sure to read the *Hadith-e-Kisa* while at the shrine, she remembered, noting that it was important for her now to always recite this prayer at Bibi Pak Daman to honor Ruqayyah's esteemed family.[507] Asma herself had begun to frequent the shrine later in life, years after she became fully aware that it was Ruqayyah bint 'Ali buried at Bibi Pak Daman. It was only when she was preparing to send her eldest daughter away to Canada for college in 1998 that she came to the shrine to seek comfort. Her mother had suggested bringing her daughter to do *girvee* at the shrine, a ritual in which a devotee would tie a thread rubbed against the shrine to a loved one to give them over in protection to the saint.[508] She returned to Ruqayyah's shrine after years away and bought incense and flowers at one of the many stalls outside the shrine, the quantity of which had increased exponentially since she had last visited. At the shrine, she had used string from all the six graves to tie around her daughter's wrist, to give her as much blessing and protection from Bibi Pak Daman as she could, echoing an act her mother had likely

[506] Field notes, conversation with Asma Chaudhry, January 6, 2011, Lahore.
[507] The *Hadith-e-Kisa* is a narrative that Shi'a Muslims recite as foundational text for the legitimacy of the Imamate, passing through 'Ali and Fatima. In this account, the Prophet Muhammad was said to have gathered Hassan, Husayn, 'Ali, and Fatimah under his cloak and labeled them his *Ahl al-Bayt*.
[508] *Girvee* in Urdu was also used as a word to mean 'pawn' or 'protect,' to give over an object to someone to keep in protection for a certain time.

performed years earlier. Apart from Ruqayyah, "no one knows if it is her daughters or her husband's sisters," she admitted; nevertheless, she believed that to be buried alongside Ruqayyah they must all be blessed, and there could only be benefit to beseeching all the women that were buried at Bibi Pak Daman. Finding comfort in her visit, regardless of the personalities buried at the shrine, Asma would visit the shrine to pray for good exam grades, a sick relative, and in times of concern for her family.

The commodities sold in the bazaar of Bibi Pak Daman reflect the very malleability of meanings associated with the shrine, allowing women to engage with the site in multiple ways. The proliferation of items associated with other figures of Shi'ism indicates the intrinsic duality of Bibi Pak Daman: Ruqayyah's presence was important in the local context, even as the shrine itself functioned as a portal of sorts, linking devotees in Pakistan to a broader sacred geography. Posters of the dual shrines of Husayn and Abbas in Karbala were sold alongside silver and gold plated *alams* and replicas of baby cradles. The items bought in the bazaar were brought into the space of the shrine to sacralize, often rubbed against the grill marking Ruqayyah's grave, with Bibi Pak Daman representing a place where women could access the blessings and sacred space of Karbala. Mehnaz Begum, a member of a prominent Shi'a family, noted that the *alam* for her family's large Muharram commemorations came yearly from Iran or Iraq, but before the first of Muharram the *alam* was taken to Bibi Pak Daman to *musk* (rubbed against the grill protecting Ruqayyah's mausoleum for blessing) and then installed for their large-scale Muharram rituals. Her family's roots were in the Mohalla Shi'a, in the old walled city of Lahore's Mochi Darwaza neighborhood. The Muharram commemorations in Mohalla Shi'a were amongst the oldest and fiercest displays of ritual in Pakistan, with

hundreds pouring into the narrow streets to listen to *majlis* sermons, recite lamentations and perform *matam* (striking of one's chest), including with knives, and take part in the *Zuljanah* processions. When Mehnaz Begum was a young girl in the 1970s, the young

(Figure 5.10: *Alams* and cradles at Bibi Pak Daman)

Shi'a men from Mochi Darwaza had enrolled in droves in the Pakistan army; "they used to come do *matam* in their uniforms and the walls would shake," she remembered. "Just like they would always come back during Muharram, the women would always go to Bibian Sahiban with our main *alam* and give condolences to Ruqayyah for the martyrdom of her brother." The *alams* at Mochi Darwaza still continued to stop at Bibi

Pak Daman, she noted, as did the *Zuljanah* process.[509] The tradition that tied an *alam* in its journey from the major shrine cities of Iran and Iraq to the center of Shi'a ritual in Lahore went through Bibi Pak Daman, bringing the events of Karbala and the tragic aftermath the women suffered together into the focal symbol of devotional practice. It is in these ties that transcended time and space that the shrine drew its power and relevance, and the interplay between narrative, consumption, and ritual continuously affirmed Bibi Pak Daman's importance in relation to the larger Islamic (and Shiite) shrines. Yet it also created separate spheres for men and women. The men, fully garbed in visual displays of masculinity, performed ritual self-flagellation and bloodletting, echoing the sacrifice of the men at Karbala. The women, in turn, travel to Bibi Pak Daman to sacralize the *alam*.

Indeed, it is not only in the surroundings of the shrine does one encounter the way women narrow distance between themselves and Karbala, with the courtyard around the mausoleum often devoted to remembrance of other revered Shi'a figures. On important days in the Islamic calendar pilgrims thronged to the shrine from all parts of Pakistan, converging on this focal point as a space for celebrating and mourning the lives of martyrs. According to Mian Muhammad Syed, Head of the Auqaf Division at Bibi Pak Daman, while the yearly total of visitors to the shrine was difficult to ascertain, as pilgrims usually moved freely between the shrine and the bazaar outside, the largest single day congregation apart from *Ashura* appears on the 9th of Zilhajj, the date of the martyrdom of Ruqayyah's husband, Muslim bin Aqīl.[510] On that day, bus loads of mourners – primarily women – arrive from across the Punjab to pay tribute to Karbala's

[509] Field notes, conversation with Mehnaz Begum, July 12, 2012, Lahore.
[510] Field notes, interview with Mian Muhammad Syed, January 3, 2011, Lahore.

first martyrs and ostensibly offer condolences to Ruqayyah for the sacrifice of her husband and sons. Many of these women from rural Punjab rarely left their villages, yet the yearly pilgrimage to Bibi Pak Daman marked a social and spiritual journey for them, a chance to leave the confines of their daily life and interact with and in sacred space. In addition, according to an official pamphlet published by the Auqaf Department, from the 8th to the 10th of Muharram, the climax of the events at Karbala, the Auqaf Department provides food and drink to the mourners who gather to commemorate the deaths of Husayn and his family, a ritual that they began in 1967 to prevent upsetting the delicate balance that existed at the shrine and that had grown exponentially in scope.[511] Notably, none of these days are those associated primarily with Ruqayyah, unlike most shrines, where the birth or death anniversaries of the saints are the most prominent dates for the gathering congregations. The ambiguity of Ruqayyah's life, however, means that numerous events could be commemorated, allowing for women to access the shrine in a range of rituals and sacred days. It is this ambiguity that conversely permits the narrowing of time and space, bringing Bibi Pak Daman and its female devotees in contact with places and events that Pakistani Islam was otherwise removed from. In a state regulating public religiosity and defining Islam by a range of punitive ordinances, Bibi Pak Daman provided a sacred space in which women could challenge these boundaries.

The Path of Moderation

By the end of the 20th century, *ziyārat* to the Sayyeda Zaynab and Bibi Pak Daman shrines gave Shi'as new spaces to socialize, create public bonds that transcended

[511] Shehzad, *Hazrat Bibi Pak Daman*, 2nd ed, 24.

national boundaries, and claim part in assertive visual and ritual displays of religious identity. The work that had begun in the narrative reimaginings at the beginning of the century had created new interpretations for the lives of Zaynab and Ruqayyah, placing them both firmly in the center of discourses about Karbala and grounding them in nationalist ideologies. Their increasing importance in rhetoric and hagiographies aided those who argued that Ruqayyah and Zaynab deserved sites of worship befitting their lofty status in Shi'ism. A confluence of forces between new regimes, old influential interests, shrine authorities, Auqaf officials, and individual donors and pilgrims would debate the meanings of these spaces as they expanded and took on renewed importance through the 1970s. With the increase in visual culture and Shi'a transnationalism, the shrines became permissive spaces for Shi'as, merchants, pilgrims, and women to assert their identities. Straddling the divide between historical and new, between Shi'a and national, and between religious tradition and innovation, the Bibi Pak Daman and Sayyeda Zaynab shrines provided sacred space for a range of evolving ideologies.

Yet if these shrines became important sites in understanding the range of behaviors that constituted "being Shi'a," especially in states where Shi'as remained a prominent minority, they also provided a means of self-reflection and policing. Some *za'ireen* at the Sayyeda Zaynab framed commerce through the lens of religious blessings, but others were influenced by a dominant ideology that termed such activity as *bid'ah*. The overwrought emotions and rituals of devotees at Bibi Pak Daman earned the disapproval of conservative Sunnis and occasionally Auqaf officials, but it also earned critique internally. Devotion was important, reasoned Zehra Niaz, but women "who wail too loudly, slap at their faces, or collapse in tears betray the dignity of our *bibis*." In the

current environment and attacks on Shi'a Muslims worldwide, "we cannot afford to be *jāhil*," she argued, invoking a term used to describe both someone who was uneducated and the condition of the Arabs before Muhammad's revelation. Rituals were important, but Shi'as could not provide enemies any further ammunition to attack them with. "The Qurān tells us everything in moderation. We cannot only do *matam* and *ziyārat* and ignore Qurān and *salāt*." After the euphoria of the Iranian Revolution, wars, violence, and ideological attacks had taken their toll. If Shi'a shrines were to remain sites of difference, they could no longer afford to be characterized as un-Islamic. Despite the tremendous blessings associated with *ziyārat* to the Sayyeda Zaynab and Bibi Pak Daman, a new age of moderation would have to reign to protect these sacred sites.

Chapter Six: Conclusion
Shrines and Meaning: Bibi Pak Daman and the Sayyeda Zaynab in 20th Century Perspective

In October 1996, Pakistan's embattled Prime Minister, Benazir Bhutto, arrived at the shrine of Bibi Pak Daman in Lahore to inaugurate the *urs* celebrations for Sayyeda Ruqayyah bint 'Ali. Centuries after Ruqayyah was said to have fled from Karbala to Lahore, Bhutto's *ziyārat* to Bibi Pak Daman, accompanied by her Shi'a "Iranian" mother, would resonate on multiple levels, harnessing a transnational sacred narrative in the service of a national appeal. The visit was covered in all the national media, with a full page image pullout in one of Pakistan's largest newspapers of Bhutto praying at the shrine, surrounded by security and devotees, washing the shrine and giving offerings of sweets and flowers.[512] For a leader standing on the precipice of crisis, with a shrinking base of political support, the optics and tropes at work were clear: this was Pakistan's first female Prime Minister, whose government faced impending dismissal, visiting the shrine to a female saint who endured great persecution - a shrine in the heart of Punjab's capital, the seat of opposition to her government.[513] For years, Bhutto had highlighted the challenges faced by women in political participation. Now she stood covered in garlands and lighting fragrant oils and incense while celebrating an *urs* through devotional rituals

[512] "Benazir, Nusrat Open Bibi Pak Daman Urs," *The News International*. October 21, 1996. Nusrat Bhutto was born in Esfahan, Iran but migrated to Pakistan with her family before Partition. News coverage of her, especially by the opposition, consistently referred to as an Iranian or referenced her Iranian Shi'a origin, despite the deeply nationalistic rhetoric of her husband, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, and her prominence in Pakistani politics.

[513] Just one month after Benazir and Nusrat Bhutto's visit to Bibi Pak Daman, Pakistan's president dismissed Bhutto's government in November 1996.

that had long been associated with female "folk" ritual practice, alongside her Shi'a mother.

(Figure 6.1: Benazir Bhutto at Bibi Pak Daman, reciting *Fateha* for Sayyeda Zaynab)

But the stories and events that were deliberately invoked by Bhutto's visit were not meant to be contained solely within in the shrine; indeed, the visit to Bibi Pak Daman

provided a way for Bhutto to access a larger, historically emotive narrative and sacred geography. At the shrine, Benazir specifically recited a *Sūrah al-Fātiha,* the first verse of the Qurān, to send blessings on Zaynab bint 'Ali. The reference to Zaynab was not a new one for Bhutto; Benazir had long drawn that comparison herself in the face of opposition and to evoke steadfastness in the face of wrong, especially after the execution of her father Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in 1979. In April 1996, just months prior to the visit to Bibi Pak Daman, she had traveled to Damascus for her second state visit at the invitation of Syrian president, Hafez al-Assad, and performed *ziyārat* to the Sayyeda Zaynab shrine.[514] At the shrine, Bhutto made a pledge to finance the expansion of the shrine's southern courtyard as a token of her devotion to Sayyeda Zaynab and in return for Zaynab's blessings in restoring Bhutto to power for a second term, allowing another visit to the shrine.[515] Benazir was warmly received at the shrine; the friendly ties between the al-Assad and Bhutto families – both nominally Shi'a ruling families in majority Sunni countries and Hafez al-Assad had offered the Bhutto children asylum after the execution

[514] Steven Erlanger, "Christopher Gets Snub From Assad in Mideast Talks," *The New York Times,* April 24, 1996. This was Bhutto's second official state visit to Damascus; her first came in 1990 during her first term as Prime Minister, when she was accompanied on her visit with the shrine's caretaker Ridha Murtadha and Syria's long-serving Minister of Culture (and current Syrian Vice-President) Najah al-Attar. See *Ziyarat al-Sayyeda Zaynab, ra'īsa, ma'a mutawalli al-maqām al-Syed Ridha Murtadha wa 'an yamīniha al-Sayyeda al-duktura Nahaj al-attar, wazīra al-thaqafīya*. Photograph. Majma' al-Sayyeda Zaynab li al-Ma'lūmāt wa al-Abhāth, Murtadha Family Private Papers, Sitt Zaynab, Syria. Despite al-Attar's involvement with the Ba'ath leadership, her brother, Issam al-Attar, was the Supreme Guide of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood from 1963-1980 and exiled from Syria since the Ba'athist takeover.

[515] Interview with Zahid Ali, Charge d'Affaires, Embassy of Pakistan, Damascus, Syria, March 26, 2012. According to Ali, this original bequest had remained an active pledge. When Bhutto's husband, Asif Ali Zardari visited the shrine as the president of Pakistan in 2010, he renewed his commitment to the pledge and was presented with technical and financial requests by the custodian of the shrine, Jameel Al-Sheikh. See also "Syrian, Pakistani presidents discuss intensifying cooperation." *SANA News Agency,* January 9, 2010.

of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto – and Benazir's reverence and identification with Zaynab were well known.[516]

(Figure 6.2: Benazir Bhutto with Najah al-Attar and representatives of the Murtadha family)

[516] See Fatima Bhutto, *Songs of Blood and Sword: A Daughter's Memoir* (New York: Nation Books, 2010), 176, 323-326.

Benazir Bhutto's visits to the shrines of Sayyeda Zaynab and Sayyeda Ruqayyah, and the connections and symbolisms invoked by her *ziyārāt* in 1996, were the culmination of decades of transnational narrative construction, international movements, national politics, personal rivalries, and new religious and gender paradigms that combined to make prominent these two shrines. Invoking Zaynab and Ruqayyah allowed Bhutto to access a complex web of transnational symbolism and meaning, and the spatial and emotional geography she traveled was a clear embodiment of the linkages, the emotive power, and the contestations over the two shrines. The Sayyeda Zaynab and Bibi Pak Daman shrines emerged and were expanded as popular pilgrimage sites primarily in the post-World War II era. Unlike older, more established Shi'a shrines in Iraq, Iran, and in Medina, around which Shi'a institutions of learning and complex political and religious patronage systems had emerged over centuries, the deliberate efforts to promote these two shrines were undertaken in a shorter span, primarily within the modern national contexts. They complicate a view that has privileged shrines to male Shi'a Imams as authentic centers of doctrinal Shi'a Islam, with devotional practice at other sites more distinctly feminized and syncretic.[517] In fact, the sacralizing and growth of the Bibi Pak Daman and Sayyeda Zaynab shrines through narratives, politics, and practice consciously

[517] Yitzhak Nakash has written in part on the appeal that the traditional male Shi'a shrines have had in attracted patronage and tribal support, primarily in Karbala, Iraq. Local religious leaders thrived on the economic and political support to be gained by settling and converting tribes; in turn, "the strong Arab tribal character of Iraqi Shi'i society found embodiment in the image of 'Abbas, son of the imam 'Ali and Husayn's half-brother." See Yitzhak Nakash, *The Shi'is of Iraq* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 144-145. Nakash notes that earlier Shi'i accounts of Karbala place little emphasis on 'Abbas but by the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, in Arabic accounts of the battle 'Abbas has become a central figure. This changing interpretation and emphasis on 'Abbas' strong physical attributes and loyalty versus Husayn's piety demonstrates the clear evolution of religious narrative and collective memory in the service of physical manifestations – in this case, the expansion of the shrines at Karbala.

linked Ruqayyah and Zaynab to central events in Shiite history and co-opted a long jurisprudential tradition, religious exhortations, and interpretive frameworks that promoted the spiritual benefits of *ziyārat* to the shrines of the male Shi'a martyrs. Rather than peripheral spaces of worship, the shrines would be imagined, re-interpreted, and then developed into critical points on a transnational gendered sacred geography – even as politics and ideologies would raise their stature in Syria and Pakistan.

By the 1990s, the decades-long efforts to promote and manage the Sayyeda Zaynab and Bibi Pak Daman shrines had come to fruition. Through the 19th century, the two shrines had warranted scant mentions in Shi'a hagiographies or in land and travel records. While pilgrimage to the shrines of the male Imams had become institutionalized by the turn of the 20th century, growing exponentially in spite of war, ideological clashes, and a changing geopolitical landscape, Bibi Pak Daman and the Sayyeda Zaynab had yet to emerge on the same scale. Yet the stories of these women and their shrines provided a kind of ideological blank slate, an ability to construct and historicize sacred space and project identity through engagement with the shrine. New narratives about their lives drew on concepts of *ziyārat* and Shi'a traditions of pre-determination and martyrdom to create transformed collective memories. As Talal Asad has noted, Islam is a discursive tradition, and practices and narratives draw their spiritual resonance from their basis in authenticity and history. Ruqayyah and Zaynab were positioned as a central part of Karbala mythology, an event that had centuries of emotive power behind it, yet the interpretations of their lives were decided grounded in the particular, as Roschanack Shaery Eisenlohr argues Shi'a transnationalism always is. Indeed, the renewed interest in Zaynab in the 20th century would gradually transform conceptions of the role of women

in Shi'a hagiographies, and narratives of Ruqayyah's life would come to mirror some of these emerging tropes. Beginning with Muhsin al-Amīn, these discussions would become increasingly tied to particular sites of worship; by 1979 two seminal hagiographies on both Zaynab and Ruqayyah would frame them as critical national and transnational Shi'a figures, with their shrines as major sites of history and worship.

In turn, *marāji'*, students, shrine authorities, merchants, women's activists, politicians, local notables, donors, and pilgrims used the shrines to promote meaning and influence. An analysis of shrine records and correspondences reveals the ways that these shrines were used and understood by multiple forces, each approaching the shrine spaces as ways to assert particular interests. Borrowed from Juan Cole's concept of the frontier shrine, this dissertation has argued that these shrines acted as internal frontiers, where competing ideologies could be articulated. The Bibi Pak Daman and Sayyeda Zaynab shrines illustrate how identities were produced on the ground, as Weiss and Makdisi have argued for, and in particular how practices of 'being Shi'a' and sectarianism evolved through finances, aesthetics, and ritual. In national contexts, the consequences of these debates were heightened at the Sayyeda Zaynab and Bibi Pak Daman shrines because of their unique position and the implications these sites had on multiple levels.

The rapidly changing geopolitical landscape from 1979 onwards gave the shrines increasing importance. Larger numbers of pilgrims were visiting the shrines, spurred on by developing infrastructure and a greater emphasis on public religiosity. Prominent national figures invoked them to achieve considerable support, and by the 1990s new plans to significantly expand the shrines were underway. In 1991, Iranian President Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani made his first foreign visit as president to Syria, visiting the

Sayyeda Zaynab to view progress and pledge another round of funding for further growth of the shrine and surrounding facilities.[518] In 1994, local groups at Bibi Pak Daman requested government aid to repair facilities, build a large new *hawza*, and expand the shrine, directing pleas to Benazir Bhutto. In response, she allocated one million rupees for the project, following up on the progress during her visit in her second term as Prime Minister.[519] These visits and pledges underscore that the processes of meaning-making around the two shrines had achieved broad acceptance.

(Figure 6.3: Ali Akbar Rafsanjani at the Sayyeda Zaynab shrine, accompanied by Hani Murtadha)

[518] Issam Hamza, "Syria Endorses Iranian Role in Gulf Security," *The Washington Post,* April 29, 1991.
[519] Letter to Shafiq Bukhari, Secretary and Chief Administrator, Auqaf, from Chaudhry Kafiyat Hussein Fidai, secretary of Anjuman-e-Nisaran-e-Ruqayyah Kubra bint 'Ali, 11 Dec. 1999. General Records Darbar Hazrat Bibi Pak Daman, Lahore.

Shrines as War Frontiers

As lived spaces, however, the meaning of these shrines was never settled, and these developments defined the Sayyeda Zaynab and Bibi Pak Daman as decidedly sectarian spaces. Those who rejected the practices associated with the shrines as un-Islamic would nevertheless adopt the same frameworks for understanding these spaces – as Shi'a shrines to Ruqayyah and Zaynab, they represented a particular kind of public Islam in a narrowing range of acceptable religiosity. The rise of ultra-conservative *Salafi* Islamic movements, from the Middle East and North Africa to South Asia and beyond, has made shrines and religious sites prime targets. These individual movements are certainly products of their particular environments, but for Shi'a Muslims, attacks on holy shrines by groups ranging from ISIS to the Pakistani Taliban represent a transnational sense of being besieged. In Pakistan, spates of suicide bombings at major shrines, including the July 2nd, 2010 bombing of the Data Ganj Baksh complex in Lahore and the October 8th attack on the Abdullah Shah Ghazi complex in Karachi, have often limited access to Bibi Pak Daman.[520] Notably, the majority of such attacks take place on Fridays – the day when traffic is at its peak at these shrines and the Auqaf Department often distributes food for *langar,* the practice of community eating. Limited access to Bibi Pak Daman prompted a reaction from Iran, which has pressured the government to provide allocations for more security and join their funding of a larger shrine.[521] In turn, shrine

[520] See Shahram Haq, "Hazrat Bibi Pak Daman *urs* begins today," *The Express Tribune,* May 10, 2011; "Suicide Bombers Kill Dozens at Pakistan Shrine," *The Guardian,* July 2, 2010, accessed February 3, 2015, http://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/jul/02/suicide-bombers-kill-dozens-pakistan-shrine; Zahir Shah Sherazi, "21 killed as Taliban storm Peshawar imambargah," *Dawn* newspaper, Feb. 14, 2015.
[521] Field notes, interview with Zehra Niaz, July 10, 2012, Lahore.

officials reached out to Asif Ali Zardari, Benazir Bhutto's widower, to remind him that "the Auqaf department of Iran has already requested to extend their architectural expertise for the construction of the shrine, and they are ready to send in a team of experts for [no] charge." The goal of the project, according to officials, was to "accommodate Muslims from all sects, not only from the country but all over the Muslim world, who have expressed deep desire to pay respects to Syeda Ruqaiya [sic]."[522] In the interim, however, armed guards and metal detectors surrounded the shrine. In Syria, the showdown between *Salafi* fighters and Shi'a devotees has turned the shrine into a battleground between warring forces. Volunteers from Iraqi Shi'a militias and the Lebanese Hezbollah have joined with Iranian Revolutionary Guard elements and vowed to protect the shrine from destruction at all costs.[523] Car bomb explosions in 2012 and 2013 caused major destruction to the Sayyeda Zaynab, setting off waves of protests in Shi'a communities around the world.[524]

Those attacking the shrines largely accepted that they were critical to Shi'a believers and their conceptions of identity, but it was that veneration that they sought to destroy. For Shias, who often view themselves as a minority increasingly under attack from the growing portions of the public who adhere to Wahhabi and *Salafi* beliefs, visitation to the shrines now carries with it acts of defiance. In my fieldwork, pilgrims

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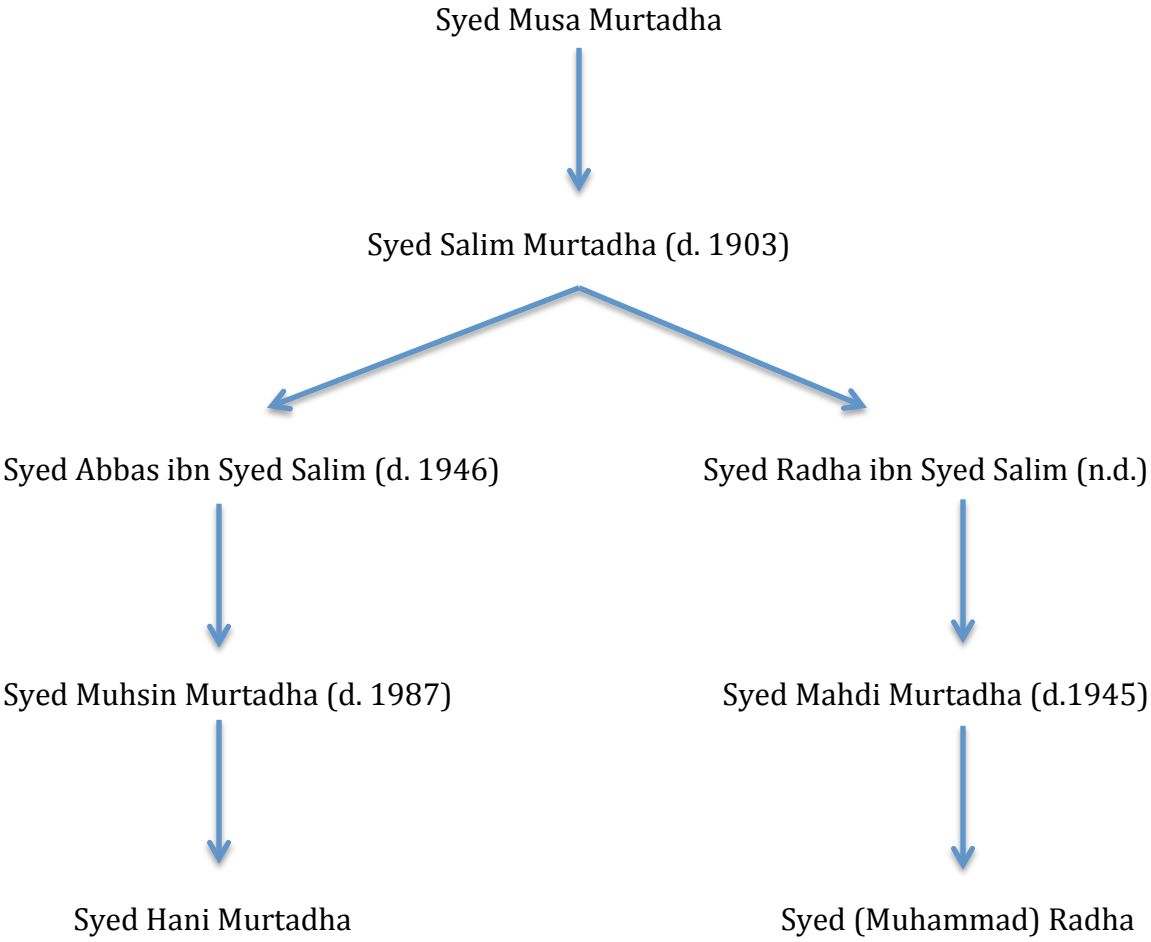
[522] Letter from Religious Affairs Committee, Bibi Pak Daman to Asif Ali Zardari, Co-Chairman, Pakistan People's Party, November 10, 2008, Records of Bibi Pak Daman Trust via Asma Mamdot, Chairman, MPA National Assembly.
[523] See Salah Nasrawi, "Iraqi Shia Dilemma in Syria," *al-Ahram Weekly*, June 26, 2013; Tim Arango, Anne Barnard, Duraid Adnan, "As Syrians Fight, Sectarian Strife Infects Mideast," *The New York Times*, June 1, 2013; Mona Mahmood and Martin Chulov, "Syrian War Widens Sunni-Shia Schism as Foreign Jihadis Join Fight for Shrines," *Guardian*, June 4, 2013.
[524] See "Car bomb damages major Shiite shrine in Syria," *USA Today*, June 15, 2012; "Protest rallies against attack on Hazrat Zainab (RA) shrine," *The Nation*, July 21, 2013.

repeatedly told me that they would not be made to fear visiting these holy shrines, despite what the "terrorists" and "*jihādi* foreigners" wanted. Ruqayyah and Zaynab would protect them, I was told over and over, and if they were to die at a holy shrine completing *ziyārat* to a revered Shi'a saint, there was no end better than that. A conversation in 2012 with one of the many guards at the Sayyeda Zaynab shrine captured that sense of righteous commitment to these sacred spaces. As I walked through the armored gates with a representative of the shrine committee, we paused to get an update from a guard patrolling a security cordon at the Sayyeda Zaynab. The enemies would never win, he vowed, "God willing [*Insh'Allah*], they cannot erase the shrine, from the air or the ground."[525] From local sites of devotion just years earlier, through the interplay of narrative, politics, and ritual, these were now holy grounds that Shi'as were prepared to make a last stand on.

[525] Field notes, subject not named, March 13, 2012, Damascus.

Appendix


Syed Musa Murtadha
Syed Salim Murtadha (d. 1903)
Syed Abbas ibn Syed Salim (d. 1946)
Syed Radha ibn Syed Salim (n.d.)
Syed Muhsin Murtadha (d. 1987)
Syed Mahdi Murtadha (d.1945)
Syed Hani Murtadha
Syed (Muhammad) Radha

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